



A PROGRAMME
FOR
POLITICAL EDUCATION

THE POLITICAL AWARENESS
OF THE
SCHOOL LEAVER

ROBERT STRADLING

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ERRATUM

page 17, Table 11

The findings quoted from a Gallup Survey were based upon an open-ended question rather than a check list and the figures for adults in Table 11 should read:

Cost of living, prices	70%
Industrial relations	8
Unemployment	5
Housing	2
EFC	2
other economic problems	6

PREFACE

For a long time it has been clear that we have been taking for granted in this country a level of political knowledge and competence among ordinary people which no longer exists if ever it did. We have been especially in the dark about not merely what goes on in schools regarding political and social education, both directly taught and the indirect effects of other lessons, but even about the proof of the pudding: what the mass of "our nation's children" in fact know when they leave school.

So the Hansard Society was delighted to sponsor two years ago an application by Mr. Robert Stradling to the Leverhulme Trust to conduct a survey on political knowledge and ignorance among ordinary school leavers. Here are the results. Mr. Stradling has at every stage consulted the Working Party of the Programme for Political Education, of which I am Chairman. This Programme is sponsored by the Hansard Society in conjunction with the Politics Association and funded by the Nuffield Foundation (latterly with some help from the Schools Council). Our aim has been to enhance what we have called "political literacy" at several different educational levels and in different contexts, and to study in the classroom the effectiveness of new approaches and also of existing methods and materials.* Although the Programme was concerned primarily with developing curricula for secondary schools, as well as for Colleges of Education and Further Education Colleges, particular attention has been given to the 14-16 year olds. Until comparatively recently the vast majority of these young people left school with little or no political education, but the raising of the minimum school leaving age to 16 and the lowering of the age of majority from 21 to 18 has meant that the average school leaver is now only two years, rather than six years, away from full civic rights; and this has strengthened the case greatly for more and more systematic political education at this level.

The case is now made very strong indeed by the publication of this survey. The most cursory glance at the tables will show that the extent of political awareness among this age group is truly appalling. It is fair to say – and Mr. Stradling has made such comparisons throughout – that it is only a little more appalling than that of the mass of the ordinary population. But it is reasonable to think that in many subjects people will know more when they leave school than they will later in adult life. But here there seems little hope that if people do not leave school adequately equipped to make the judgements that they have to make – in casting a vote, in being a member of

* See working documents 1-5 of the Programme for Political Education, available from the Hansard Society, 12 Gower Street, London WC1E 6DP.

a trade union, in standing up for themselves or representing themselves in a multitude of different capacities in life — that they will ever be better at it later on. The schools must take up the burden of this work.

A good deal of work had been done in this general field, sometimes called political socialisation, in the United States, but relatively little has as yet been done in Britain; and what has been done has tended to concentrate on examining political attitudes and values rather than political knowledge, particularly political knowledge in our rather special sense of political literacy: that combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills that is needed for somebody both to understand and to be effective. Moreover, a good proportion of these studies suffered from a reliance on very small and often regionally-biased samples. Therefore we were happy in the Hansard Society and in the Programme for Political Education to initiate, in September 1975, this investigation of Bob Stradling's so as to obtain for the Working Party on Curricular Development an accurate picture of the state of awareness of this age group. We now know the full extent of the problem that we have to face.

Some of this report is fairly technical because it is important to justify the basis on which such investigations are made. They are made for the advancement of knowledge, not to cause a sensation. But the results are, in a quite unintended sense, perhaps sensational. Consider for example, that almost half of the young people taking part in this survey think that the House of Commons makes all the important decisions on the running of the country; that 46 per cent cannot name even one pressure group; that one in four fifteen year-olds associates the policy of nationalisation with the Conservative Party; and that 44 per cent believe that the IRA is a Protestant organisation.

In the face of beliefs like this, clearly something has to be done. But in order to know what to do, we have to understand what the problem is. In that respect we are in Mr. Stradling's debt.

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I am also grateful to Frauke Hansen who typed the manuscript and gave invaluable help in the administration of the project, and to Nigel Colman for his assistance in coding over 4,000 questionnaires (a daunting experience for any researcher).

Robert Stradling
Hansard Society

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Until comparatively recently the prevailing view on political education in England was either that it was already adequately taken care of through History, Geography, Social and General Studies or that it was a wholly unsuitable subject for the school curriculum. However, within the last decade a striking growth of interest in political education has been generated by: a widespread concern about the development of a distinctive youth culture which appears to encourage an apathetic, even apolitical, response to public affairs;¹ the lowering of the age of majority including the minimum voting age to 18 in 1968;² and a growing and more positive official attitude to social and political education in schools and colleges of further education.³

The coincidence of all these various factors has brought into sharp focus such questions as: how much does the average school leaver know about public affairs? How well prepared is he or she to comprehend and participate in political activities? What influence does the school have on the political awareness of its students? and so on. The purpose of the survey reported in the following pages is to seek answers to these questions. More precisely, the aims of this survey are fourfold. The first aim is to produce a reliable estimate of the extent of political knowledge and ignorance of 15 to 16 year-olds. The estimate is based upon a stratified national sample which included young people of varying intellectual abilities and from a wide variety of educational backgrounds. The second aim of the survey is to establish a 'yardstick' of political literacy against which to measure the effects of future developments in political education.⁴ The third aim is to examine the sources of political information in our own society and their role as political educators, and the fourth and final aim of the survey is to provide information which can help to establish priorities for developing better curricula on political education — what needs to be taught, what gaps need to be filled and how. To some extent, of course, priorities for the classroom will emerge through demonstrating where the areas of greatest political ignorance lie; but they are also likely to emerge if this survey can highlight any areas of greater knowledge and interest which could be built on and developed in an educational programme. Such an approach cannot be based on any simplistic view of political knowledge. Politics is a complicated thing and a multi-dimensional view of political knowledge needs to be adopted. Too many surveys of adults' and children's political perceptions have adopted a rather simplistic, one-dimensional view of political knowledge, usually derived from narrowly defining 'politics' as either the study of national and local government institutions or the study of the activities of political parties.

The Programme for Political Education adopts a broad definition of politics as "the process through which conflicts of interest and values within a group are conciliated";⁵ and also a broad view of what constitutes political knowledge. The politically literate person is not seen as simply someone who has amassed a large amount of factual knowledge but as someone who has also acquired a good deal of practical knowledge and consequently knows how to act effectively in a political situation, how to obtain the information which he lacks, and how to critically evaluate the standpoints of different groups.

This distinction between 'propositional' or factual knowledge and 'procedural' knowledge or "know-how" is an important one. Until recently political education, and much other education besides, has concentrated on the teaching of propositional knowledge, perhaps because it is more easily examined, but it does mean that much of the knowledge which is taught is partly or even wholly divorced from the practical world. And yet, surely, a politically literate person is one who can either make effective use of the knowledge he has, or knows what knowledge he lacks — but also knows where he can obtain it — in order to have an effect. Within these two basic dimensions we may also distinguish three sub-divisions. They are not necessarily the only possible sub-divisions, nor are they mutually exclusive. There may in fact be a considerable amount of overlap between each dimension. What does differentiate them from each other however is that they represent distinctive perspectives on the political world and the knowledge within each dimension is put to different uses.

First, there is knowledge appropriate to the political consumer which focusses upon both the individual's awareness of what he wants from the political authorities and on his perceptions of what he can expect from them. At the factual level this consists of a knowledge of current affairs and of the key political problems and issues; knowledge of where the parties stand on the main disputes; and also knowledge of the positions of other groups in society such as the trade unions and business. At the procedural level this consists of knowledge of how specific policies and decisions will affect them and how to obtain more information on, or benefit from, or even obtain relief from these policies and decisions.

Second, there is knowledge appropriate to the political actor, participant or activist. This may appear to some readers to be singularly inappropriate for 15 and 16 year-olds who have virtually no opportunities for participating in national politics. Indeed, opportunities for most of them may not greatly increase even when they have the vote. However, there are more frequent opportunities for participating in other political and quasi-political situations, such as decision-making in the family, school, peer group and youth club. Direct experience of such situations can provide young people with certain kinds of procedural or tactical knowledge including knowing alternative ways

of settling disputes, knowing different ways and means of influence, and knowing which means of influence are appropriate to different situations. Also, to enable the political participant or potential participant to recognise, understand and explain political situations, he needs to develop a language in which to talk about politics; and this involves knowledge and understanding of some basic political concepts including conflict and power in its various forms such as authority, influence, reason, manipulation and force, and order, compliance, consent and dissent.⁶

The third and final sub-division consists of knowledge appropriate to the student of politics. While the previous sub-division consisted almost wholly of knowledge of procedures and processes, this final dimension is overwhelmingly concerned with the "what" rather than the "how". It would be wholly misleading to me to allege that it consists of knowledge which is mostly useful for passing examinations, writing books or entering Parliament, but it is knowledge which is likely to appear more esoteric to the average fifteen year-old than the knowledge in the other two sub-divisions. It includes knowledge of institutional procedures and the responsibilities of local and national political institutions; an awareness of the role of political parties and pressure groups in the decision-making process; an understanding of the relation between institutions and political ideas and values; and finally, a knowledge of politics in other countries.

The chief value of this multi-dimensional approach is that it greatly lessens the risk of under-estimating the political awareness of young people. Instead of assuming that a given population can be divided into two camps: a small group who are politically-knowledgeable and the ignorant masses, it allows of the possibility that the individual may be highly knowledgeable about some aspects of political life and ignorant of others. That it may be possible, for example, for an individual to obtain a high grade in an 'Advanced' or level examination on the British Constitution and yet be relatively clueless as a political consumer, and vice versa. Political judgements can be shrewd and relevant and yet formal political erudition may be low. It would make very little sense to rank either individual higher than the other on some scale of political knowledge simply because we are talking about two different kinds of knowledge.

Method

Since one of the main aims of this research project was to obtain an accurate description of the extent of political awareness amongst young people of school-leaving age (15-16), it was necessary to adopt the kind of mass survey techniques which would permit both generalisations and descriptions of differences between sub-groups within the total population of fifteen year-olds in secondary schools in England and Wales.

This involved initially the selection of a sample, or cross-section, which was small enough for convenient data collection and large enough to be representative of the population from which it was drawn. A stratified random sample was preferred to a simple random sample because the process of obtaining the latter would have been extremely expensive and time-consuming. Furthermore, simple random samples do not guarantee representativeness. By sheer chance it is possible, for example, to draw a sample heavily biased towards some minority group. A survey based on such a sample would produce a great deal of interesting information about that group but it would not be possible to make generalisations about the average fifteen year-old. Stratification, on the other hand, ensures that *all* the relevant sub-groups within the population are properly represented by dividing the population into a number of parts (or strata) and selecting a sample from each part. In this case it was decided to use type of school as the basis for the stratification, on the grounds that both political socialisation research in this country and educational research in general has found this to be a significant independent variable.

The multi-stage sampling procedure which was adopted is described in greater detail in Appendix B. However, it is worth mentioning here the following features of the procedure. Firstly, one-third of the 108 Local Education Authorities, established after the Local Government Act of 1972, were randomly selected and then asked for their co-operation. 33 of them agreed to participate in this project. All the state secondary schools within these Authorities were then listed under four separate headings: Secondary Modern, Grammar, Coexisting and Non-Coexisting Comprehensives.⁷

A sampling frame was then drawn up (see Table A of Appendix B) based on the national distribution of these four types of school and 100 schools were randomly selected from the four lists in direct proportion to their national distribution. 72 schools eventually agreed to participate in the survey. The breakdown of the sample by type of school is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Type of School and Pupils in the Sample

	Pupils	
	%	N
Coexisting Comprehensives	24	972
Non-Coexisting Comprehensives	18	730
Grammar Schools	20	810
Secondary Modern Schools	38	1,515
	100	4,027

Self-completion questionnaires were sent to all 72 schools to be administered by teachers to the entire fifth form, regardless of streams and including even remedial pupils. This produced a sample of approximately 4,000 pupils. Ideally, it would have been preferable if head teachers had selected a cross-section or a random sample in direct proportion to the size of their fifth form (e.g. one pupil in every ten) but in practice it was far from certain that all head teachers would choose a sample which was truly representative of this age group. It was therefore more practicable to ask them to include the whole fifth form in the sample and weight the results to reduce any bias which this might have introduced into the sample.

It was decided to use a pencil-and-paper questionnaire, rather than some other method such as interviewing, partly because of the constraints imposed by available funds, time and manpower but also because a relatively large national sample was required to permit generalisations to be made from the survey data. However, the questionnaire method can have its drawbacks. There is always a risk when employing standardised wording and standardised ordering of questions that a degree of uniformity will be imposed on pupils' responses which does not, in reality, exist. Face-to-face interviews, on the other hand, might reveal that such standardised questions are interpreted in diverse ways by different respondents. To minimise this risk several teachers were consulted during the initial drafting stage, some open-ended and semi-projective questions were employed, and in the winter of 1974-5 later versions of the questionnaire were pre-tested in four different schools: two genuine comprehensives, one in the Midlands and one in the South East; a secondary modern in the North West of England; and several versions of the semi-projective questions described in Chapter 4 were pre-tested in a Midlands Sixth Form College. In these pilot tests alternative versions of many of the questions were tried out to see which were most meaningful to young people.

A further drawback of questionnaires — perhaps the most problematical — is that they need a certain level of literacy and not just political literacy to complete them. It would be misguided to equate political ignorance with illiteracy and a written questionnaire may underestimate the young person's knowledge. Some fifteen-year-olds may have a kind of oral political knowledge which, due to a low level of literacy, they are unable to translate into writing but might reveal through, say, a face-to-face interview. This may be particularly true of their knowledge of the politics of everyday life — an aspect of interaction more readily described in oral rather than written terms, at least in some contexts. Nevertheless, the guts of modern politics at all levels beyond the politics of everyday life is expressed through policies, issues, political ideas and ideologies, plans, rules, laws and even constitutions, all of which constitute an extensive written culture and they are therefore only likely to be motivated to learn about them, if they have some measure of literacy.

For this reason it is possible that self-completion questionnaires will only marginally underestimate the respondents' political awareness, particularly if they are still at school and only have a limited contact with quasi-political situations. But equally, for the same reason, it was not possible to include all facets of the knowledge component of political literacy as outlined in the previous section since some of these are more readily tapped through interviews.

We turn now in the following chapter to consider the samples responses to the questions measuring political knowledge.

Notes:

- 1 See, for example, Philip Abrams & Alan Little, "The Young Voter in British Politics", *British Journal of Sociology*, XVI (1965), pp. 95-109, and F. Musgrove, *Youth and the Social Order*, Routledge 1964.
- 2 The Latey Report, *Age of Majority*, (HMSO 1967) Cmnd. No. 3342 considered civil matters but their terms of reference did not include the minimum voting age which was under separate consideration by the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law. The latter recommended reducing the voting age to 20 but the Representation of the People Act in 1968 set the minimum voting age at 18.
- 3 The Newsom Report, *Half our Future*, (HMSO 1963), for example, made several passing references to the importance of political education including the now well known exhortation that 'A man who is ignorant of the society in which he lives, who knows nothing of its place in the world and who has not thought about his place in it, is not a free man even though he has a vote.' Some of the Schools Council Working Papers, particularly *Working Paper No. 2: Raising the School Leaving Age*, recommended the teaching of politics including political ideas to even the less able pupils.
- 4 To this end arrangements have been made to deposit the data in processed form at the Social Science Research Council's Survey Archive at the University of Essex.
- 5 See Working Paper No. 2: 'Political Literacy' and Working Paper No. 5 'Issues and Political Problems' of the Programme for Political Education.
- 6 See the Programme for Political Education's Document No. 3: "Basic Concepts for Political Education".
- 7 A brief comment is called for here concerning these last two categories: coexisting and non-coexisting comprehensives. It is extremely difficult to ascertain whether or not a school which is called a comprehensive genuinely provides education for all pupils within a given area, regardless of ability, or is merely a re-named secondary modern. To get round this difficulty, comprehensives were divided into those which co-exist in one locality with selective or Grammar schools and those which do not. There is no absolute guarantee that this laborious method infallibly distinguishes the genuine from the mis-named Comprehensive but it appears to be the best approach available for a large national survey.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE & POLITICAL IGNORANCE

What do we know about the adult world as a basis for comparison? Broadly speaking, political research in Britain has been more concerned with the general public's political *attitudes* than with their *knowledge* of politics. Some knowledge questions have appeared in opinion surveys but usually they have been too limited in scope – mostly focussing on awareness of political personalities – and too few in number to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent of the mass public's political awareness. It is apparent, however, from several surveys that many people are ignorant of even the most important and well-publicised political policies and know even less about the outcomes of these policies and how they themselves are or will be affected. For example, in 1963 a Gallup Poll found that a sizeable minority believed that Britain was already a member of the European Economic Community.¹ In 1964, National Opinion Polls also found a fairly large minority of electors who thought that it would be a good idea to nationalise the mines and the railways,² and in 1970, in a survey on race prejudice, Hartmann and Husband found people recommending, as a matter of urgency, the adoption of policies which had already been in operation for five years.³ Government Ministers and the media, including the popular tabloids, explain current economic policies by referring to such terms as 'inflation', 'imports' and 'devaluation' and yet these words are known to be meaningless to many people.⁴ So there appears to be a very low level of political consumer awareness in our present-day electorate; but it is necessary to emphasise again that such a view is based on bits of evidence gleaned from a variety of sources rather than from a single, systematic survey. This raises the problem, it has to be admitted, of whether a definitive answer can ever be given to the question of how politically knowledgeable our sample of fifteen year-olds are. Some comparisons can be made within the sample to show, say, that one group with a particular social background is more or less knowledgeable than some other group from a different social background; but in order to answer the question fully one would need some kind of empirical "benchmark", such as a survey of fifteen year-olds conducted at an earlier date, or a survey of some other age group. Neither is available. Consequently, the answer to the question of how knowledgeable or ignorant young people are about politics can only be partially objective and empirical; it is also, inevitably, subjective and prescriptive. Some people will always feel that political knowledge among adolescents is dangerous as such; and others will interpret any ignorance among "the citizens of tomorrow" as a threat to democracy. In assessing the findings presented below I have therefore tried to rate political knowledge according to this view. For example, it is more important, because it is more useful, for young people

to know some of the key issues than it is to know the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Similarly, it is more useful to have a realistic view of the powers of the House of Commons than it is to know the stages through which a bill passes before going on to the statute books.

Results

Identification of Political Officeholders

A number of political commentators and politicians have criticised the media's tendency to over-emphasise the gladiatorial aspects of contemporary politics, presenting it as a conflict of personalities rather than a conflict of ideas and policies.⁵ It is of course true that at times the debate between the political parties over policies has been pitched at a level too esoteric to be of interest to ordinary people but nevertheless, the media's personalisation of politics is well-documented.⁶ The findings in Table 2 testify to this. Well over three-quarters of the entire sub-sample are familiar with the names of the leaders of the three main political parties.

Table 2

Identification of Political Officeholders

Names Prime Minister	94%
Names Leader of Opposition	82%
Names Liberal Leader	86%
Names Foreign Secretary	47%
Names local MP	52%

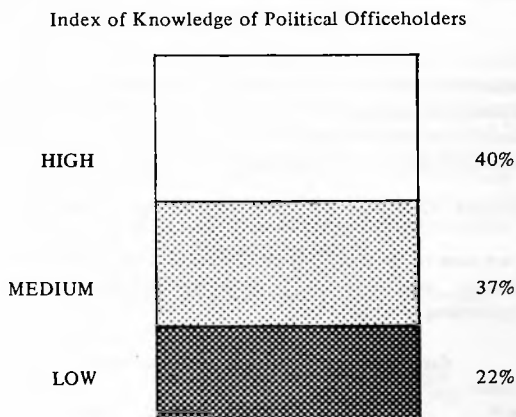
More indirect evidence of the influence of media presentation may be provided by the tendency in Table 2 for familiarity with the name of a politician to vary almost in direct proportion to the amount of publicity which he or she receives from the media. Thus the Prime Minister is known by all but 6 per cent of the sample and only 1 in 5 do not know who Jeremy Thorpe or Margaret Thatcher are. The Foreign Secretary receives comparatively less media coverage and the local MP's publicity, locally as well as nationally, is usually spasmodic and this appears to be reflected in the fact that fewer fifteen year-olds can identify them.

However, although differences in the extent of publicity may account in part for the percentage differences in political awareness in Table 2, media publicity is not the only factor involved. An ability to identify political personalities is also likely to depend on the respondent's general interest in politics. Even at the height of the controversy between Mr. Reg Prentice and his constituency Labour Party at Newham North East, a survey by Gallup found that

over one-third of a sample of Labour supporters in that constituency did not know the name of their MP; and, in spite of the fact that the whole controversy centred on that MP's alleged moderateness, when respondents were asked about their MP's views, nearly half the sample were ill-informed.⁷

To obtain an overall picture of the extent of the sample's knowledge of political officeholders an Index was constructed. A score of +1 was given to each respondent for correctly naming the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Foreign Secretary giving a maximum score of +4; while a -1 was given for each incorrect answer giving a minimum score of -4. The results are presented in Figure 1 and show that only two-fifths of the sample were high scorers on this index, that is, scored +3 or more. Nevertheless, while this figure is less than one might expect from Table 2, if we compare this index with those constructed for the other political areas discussed in this chapter then we find that more students score highly on this index than on any other.

Figure 1



Local Politics

A variety of surveys have shown that the adult public is not particularly interested in or feels very strongly about local politics. Butler & Stokes, for example, found that the electorate expressed less interest in local elections than in general elections⁸ — a finding which is clearly confirmed by the differences in turnout at both kinds of election. Butler & Stokes also found that interest in local political issues was very low.⁹ We know considerably less, however, about the public's knowledge of local politics.

The findings in Table 3 follow directly from Table 2 and deal with the local aspect of national politics. In addition to being asked to name their local member of Parliament, respondents were also asked to state which political party he represented and which constituency he was elected for. As is often the case in adult surveys, more can name their MP's party than can name their MP. This corroborates the view that most people tend to vote for the party not the man; a tendency well-established before the age of eighteen. The fact that only a small percentage can give the name of the constituency in which they live is interesting. Most of the young people able to correctly answer this question live in small towns with no more than one or two constituencies, or in rural constituencies. The response rate was far lower among those who lived in large metropolitan areas such as Birmingham with its twelve constituencies or Liverpool. But the low response rate is not just because they live in constituencies with unfamiliar names. Many of these young people simply did not know what the term 'constituency' meant. To some it appeared to be a simile for 'political party' and others thought they were being asked for the name of their electoral ward, and yet others seemed to think it was another name for town or district and gave that.

Table 3 Information on the local MP

		Adults*
Names MP's party	74%	78%
Names constituency	27%	
Names both MP and Party	27%	
Names MP, party and constituency	20%	

* Source: Granada/NOP Survey on The State of the Nation.

In Table 4 we turn to the kind of political knowledge which could be said to be constitutional; that is to say, it presents responses to questions about regulations governing local politics.

Table 4 Constitutional Politics at the local level †

QUESTION *	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE	TOTAL
(a) Local councillors have right to change laws which have been passed by Parliament	11%	<u>70%</u>	18%	99%
(b) Local councillors have to stand for election once every 3 years	<u>36%</u>	21%	41%	98%
(c) MPs do not have to live in their constituencies	<u>53%</u>	28%	17%	98%

† Differences between types of school were minimal.

* Correct answers to the 3 questions are underlined.

Other surveys have shown that the public as a whole feel more remote from their local councillors than from their MP. Very few, for example, are able to name a local councillor,¹⁰ and, as Grant found in his pilot survey, there is widespread confusion amongst young people concerning the distinction between a councillor and a local government official and, in addition, a lack of information about the regulations relating to councillors.¹¹ The small number of respondents giving the correct answer to (b) (i.e. those who know that local councillors have to stand for election once every three years) supports this general impression.

Although young people may be ill-informed about regulations for local elections and local government, it can be seen from their answers to (a) (i.e. local councillors have the right to change laws which have been passed by Parliament) that they have few misconceptions about the powers of councillors. Indeed there is evidence from answers to another question discussed elsewhere in the Report¹² that few young people would turn to their councillor for help with a local problem or issue. When asked how they would advise their parents if they found out that their home was to be pulled down to permit a new road to be built: only 7 per cent suggested that the first thing to do would be to contact the local councillor compared with 23 per cent (the largest group) suggesting the local MP.

By way of contrast, these young people appear to have a surprisingly good working knowledge of the official bodies which are responsible for providing their families with essential services. Admittedly, they were presented with a slightly over-simplified view since distinctions were not drawn between the responsibilities of district and county councils or metropolitan authorities, but even so Table 5 seems to show that the majority of young people are familiar with some of the complexities of local government administration and can readily distinguish the different levels of responsibilities of regional boards, local councils and the national government.

Table 5 Identification of responsibilities for local services

Who is responsible for: †

	GOVERN- MENT	COUNCIL	REGIONAL BOARD	NOT SURE	ADULTS* giving correct answers
Water Supply	4%	29%	<u>57%</u>	4%	
Social Security	<u>61%</u>	23%	5%	5%	67%
Refuse Collection	6%	<u>72%</u>	8%	9%	93%
Parks and Swimming Pools	8%	<u>74%</u>	11%	3%	
Electricity Supply	14%	10%	<u>67%</u>	4%	
Housing	26%	<u>61%</u>	3%	4%	80%

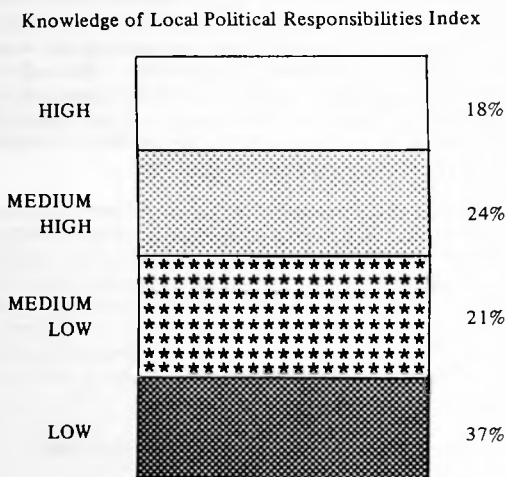
† Correct answers underlined.

* Source: 1967 Royal Commission on Local Government in England; "Community Attitudes Survey: England". Research Studies No. 9.

The comparison with adults in Table 5 is interesting. The adolescents are less knowledgeable than adults but considering that as tax payers, rate payers and voters the latter are more likely to know the answers to these questions, the difference between the two samples is not as great as might be expected.

However, a rather different picture presents itself when the answers in Table 5 are summated to form an index.* The results are produced in Figure 2 and show that the majority of the sample score low or moderately low on this test and less than one-fifth – half of the number scoring highly in Figure 1 – are high scorers (that is score +5 or more out of a maximum score of +6).

Figure 2



National Government

The kind of knowledge which is being assessed in this section focusses upon the structure and working of those formal institutions which play a major part in national government. It was not possible, of course, to include questions on all aspects of national political institutions. This would have meant either that the questionnaire would have been too long or that it would have

* Procedure: Index is based on answers given in Table 5. A score of +1 was given for each correct answer giving a maximum score of +6 and a score of -1 for each incorrect answer giving a minimum score of -6.

been full of questions about aspects of politics which have a dubious utility for the average young person, who is neither a prospective professional politician nor a prospective candidate for an examination in British Constitution or its equivalent.

Consequently there are no questions about the Speaker or Black Rod or the Constitutional position of the monarch. Some of the questions which have been selected are purely factual ones about members of Parliament, elections, ministers and so on, but there are also a few questions which, in addition to measuring this ability to grasp constitutional facts, also seek to find out whether or not these young people have a realistic pictures of the workings of Parliament and government.

Table 6, for example, shows not only that few young people know how many MPs were elected to the House of Commons, it shows that quite a large proportion of them have a totally unrealistic picture of the size of the lower chamber with nearly half the fifteen year-olds thinking either that it is half its actual size or even smaller, and, indeed, in the pilot survey it was revealed that several respondents thought there were two to three thousand members of Parliament.

Table 6 Number of MPs in the House of Commons

Number	%	Adults
65	8	
140	17	
395	24	
550	10	
635	26	22%
820	4	
none of these	5	

* Source: *Granada/NOP Survey*

A lack of political realism amongst young people is also apparent in the results presented in Table 7. They were asked firstly to say what is the MOST IMPORTANT thing which Parliament does and then to signify the other functions which are also important. It can be seen from the first column in this Table that according to a large proportion of the sample the two most important functions of Parliament are to make laws and to make decisions on the running of the country. That half the sample should choose the latter as the most important would seem to testify to a widespread lack of awareness about the realities of parliamentary government under the present party system.

The overall picture which many young people seem to have of the House of Commons is of a political market place where, if the MPs are not actively legislating and making crucial decisions, then they are ventilating the public's grievances and keeping the public well-informed on the Government's actions and intentions. We obtain a similar picture from their list of other functions in column 3. It is also worth noting that few young people adopt the cynical, though perhaps realistic (the two terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive) view that under the Party system the primary functions of Parliament are those of a "talking shop" and of a reservoir of people from whom the government is chosen.

Table 7 Functions of Parliament

	Most Important Function	Ranking	Other Functions	Ranking
Makes laws	41%	2	37%	1
Discusses main issues	8%	7	32%	4
Provides a group from whom the Government is chosen	10%	6	23%	7
Tells people what govern- ment is doing	19%	4	34%	3
Tries to control government	16%	5	28%	5
Passes on views of the people to the government	27%	3	35%	2
Makes all the important deci- sions on running the country	49%	1	26%	6
Totals *	170%		215%	

* Totals add up to over 100% because respondents made more than one choice.

Further knowledge, or more accurately ignorance, of the more formal and constitutional aspects of politics is illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8 Constitutional Knowledge *

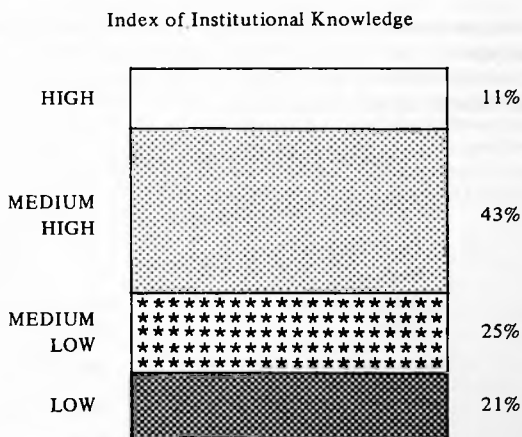
QUESTIONS	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
# a. "A backbench MP is any member of Parlia- ment who is not a Government minister"	49%	<u>21%</u>	28%
# b. "The political party with the most voters always forms the Government"	48%	<u>44%</u>	6%
# c. "A General Election must be held at least every FOUR years"	64%	<u>28%</u>	7%
# d. "Anyone over the age of 18 can become an MP"	43%	<u>30%</u>	25%
# e. "A Government Minister must have previous experience"	49%	<u>24%</u>	25%
# f. "The Prime Minister is the one who can choose to call an election"	<u>34%</u>	51%	13%

* Correct answers underlined.

In all six questions the knowledgeable pupils are outnumbered by those giving wrong answers. The responses to two of the questions (# b. and # e.) also demonstrate a lack of awareness of some of the realities of contemporary British politics. For example, from answers to # e. it would seem that almost half the sample see Government ministers as managers specifically trained to take control of certain departments.

As with other sections in this chapter, an index was constructed; in this case an Index of Institutional Knowledge based on the answers presented in Tables 6 and 8.* As can be seen in Figure 3 only a few young people score highly on this index and with a range of scores from -8 to +8 the mean score for the sample is 2.478. It would seem from this and from Figure 3 that most young people have acquired some knowledge of political institutions and are neither high nor low scorers. However, it should be observed that the kind of knowledge being tested here is of a relatively inert kind consisting of facts about institutional procedure and regulations rather than the kind of more dynamic knowledge which accompanies a realistic view of parliamentary politics. That is, an understanding of the powers of parliament and the role of the parties and pressure groups in the political system.

Figure 3



- * *Procedure: The index is based on answers presented in Table 6 and 8. A score of +1 was given for each correct answer giving a maximum score of +8 and a score of -1 for each incorrect answer giving a minimum score of -8.*

Knowledge of the more informal aspects of national politics is extremely low. Table 9 shows that just under half of the sample either cannot think of the name of a pressure group or are simply unfamiliar with the term, and only a small minority of those who do know what a pressure group is can name more than one.

Table 9 **Number of Pressure Groups mentioned**

names 0 groups	46%
names 1 group	54%
names 2 groups	38%
names 3 groups	26%
names 4 groups	17%

Table 10 shows the types of pressure groups which were named. These have been categorised under three main headings: sectional groups, promotional groups and international groups. The last category is self-explanatory and mostly the answers focussed upon terrorist groups. The other two terms are taken from Finer.¹³ Sectional pressure groups are those which protect or defend the interests of a particular sector of society, while promotional groups are those which seek to further a specific cause.

On the whole, sectional groups usually receive more media coverage than promotional groups and one would expect young people to be more familiar with them and, to the extent to which they are at all familiar with any pressure group, then Table 10 upholds this expectation.

Table 10 **Types of Pressure Groups named**

SECTIONAL GROUPS:

Trade Unions	58%
Business	7%
Political group	32%
Other	17%

PROMOTIONAL GROUPS: 6%

INTERNATIONAL GROUPS: 8%

TOTAL: 128% *

* *Total exceeds 100% because each respondent had four choices.*

As might be expected the largest group to be chosen are the trade unions but the second largest category – the political groups – is rather ambiguous and needs further explanation. Although the question specifically asked

respondents to think of groups other than political parties, a sizeable minority ignored this injunction. Responses mentioning any of the three main political parties were rejected but references to minority parties such as the Scottish or Welsh Nationalists or the British Communist Party were included under the heading of political pressure groups. It is of course debatable whether this inclusion represents an understanding of the term 'pressure group' but it does at least give some insight into the political information which they have accumulated.

However, the overall impression from both tables, regardless of how one interprets the responses, is of a widespread ignorance of an important aspect of national politics.

Issue Awareness

Two aspects of political knowledge which are central to political consumer awareness as outlined in Chapter One are awareness of the main issues of the day and awareness of differences between the policies of the three major political parties.

Table 11 shows what the fifteen year-olds think were the main issues at the time of the survey and compares their responses with those of adults in an opinion poll conducted by Gallup, also in the summer of 1975. It should be kept in mind when comparing these two sets of findings that slightly different questions were employed. Firstly, the Hansard sample were asked an open-ended question allowing them to choose any issue they wished whereas the Gallup sample were presented with a check list of issues (the first six listed in Table 11) to choose from. Secondly, the Hansard sample were asked to say which is the most important problem facing them and their generation, whereas the Gallup sample were asked to choose the most urgent problem facing the country.¹⁴ Consequently, it is inadvisable to draw direct comparisons between the percentages; but it is interesting to compare the relative importance which each sample gives to each issue.

Table 11 **Most Serious Problems**

TYPE OF PROBLEM	SAMPLE	ADULTS
Cost of living, prices	24%	83%
Industrial relations	—	28%
Unemployment	35%	23%
Housing	4%	8%
EEC	1%	5%
Other economic problems	3%	14%
Environmental problems	24%	
Defence and international affairs	7%	
Political problems (threats to democracy, etc.)	5%	
Generation Gap	3%	
Education	4%	
Lack of youth amenities	2%	
Crime and Violence	4%	

This particular question proved popular. Only 13 per cent left it unanswered and several mentioned more than one problem. The range of political issues chosen is wide: from inflation to mugging and from the need to build more youth clubs to unemployment; but it is apparent that, like their elders, they are mainly preoccupied with economic problems. Few choose personal problems with parents or school or problems connected with their community such as town amenities and very few, much fewer one suspects than previous generations, choose defence and international problems such as the threat of a nuclear or of any other kind of war.

What is clear is that their awareness of issues is greatly shaped by their perceptions of the ways in which their lives are directly affected. Most of them are in their final year at school and the prospect of getting or not getting a job looms large. This is clearly reflected in the table. Unemployment is picked as the most important issue by more than one-third of the sample. Inflation and environmental problems such as pollution, over-population and shortages of raw materials all have their direct effects on these young people and are perceived as such. Adults also perceive issues in this way, and since in any random sample a large proportion will be employed in industry, it is perhaps not surprising that industrial relations as a problem ranks highly among adults but not among school pupils.

Turning to their perceptions of what the three main political parties stand for, it may be seen in Table 12 that only three of the eight policy proposals put before them – two Labour policies (Nationalisation and the Comprehensive of schools) and one Conservative policy (the retention of private education and pay beds in hospitals) – were accurately attributed by more than half the sample. The overall impression given by this table is one of widespread confusion and ignorance. For example, although over half of the sample correctly identify nationalisation with the Labour party, one-in-four associate it with the Conservatives and more identify tax cuts with Labour than with the Conservative Party. They are also especially ignorant of Liberal policies – a feature which has also been observed in adult surveys. For example, during the 1964 election Blumler and McQuail employed a similar test of policy identification to the one used here (with different policies, of course) and found that less than 1 in 10 respondents correctly identified Liberal policies.¹⁵

This high degree of ignorance on the part of adults and young people alike may be due to the Liberal party's failure to get its policies across to the public or, as some Liberals might reasonably claim, it may be due to the tendency of the other two parties to absorb Liberal policies. This might certainly explain why only 18 per cent identify the Liberals with legal checks on inflation. Both of the other parties have flirted with this policy although only the Liberal party included it in their October 1974 manifesto.

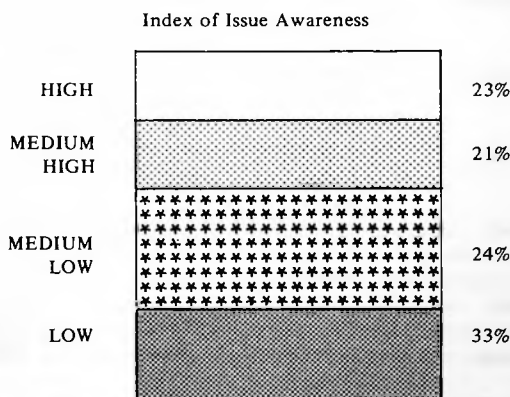
Table 12

Identification of Party Policies

POLICIES	POLITICAL PARTIES		
	CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL
1. Taxes should be cut as soon as possible	<u>33%</u>	38%	24%
2. The Government should take over and run more industries	26%	<u>60%</u>	10%
3. The Government should create more Comprehensive Schools	21%	<u>59%</u>	16%
4. Workers and management should co-operate as partners	24%	44%	<u>27%</u>
5. Council tenants should be encouraged to buy their houses	<u>48%</u>	25%	21%
6. Defence expenditure should be cut	<u>27%</u>	<u>41%</u>	27%
7. People should be allowed to spend their money on pay beds and private schools	<u>60%</u>	18%	17%
8. Inflation can only be checked by laws	<u>33%</u>	44%	<u>18%</u>

Clearly then there seems to be a good deal of ignorance of some of the issues which divide the political parties and the range of responses in Table 12 suggests that even some of the correct identifications of policies were probably reached by guesswork. This is borne out if we examine the index of issue awareness in Figure 4. The same scoring procedure was adopted as for the previous indices* and although those scoring +3 or more out of a maximum score of +8 were ranked as High Scores it is still only a small minority who come into this category.

Figure 4



- * *Procedure: A score of +1 given for each correct answer to the 8 policy statements reported above and a score of -1 given for each incorrect score. Those scoring +3 and above were ranked as HIGH, those scoring 0 to +2 ranked MEDIUM HIGH, those scoring -1, -2 ranked MEDIUM LOW and those scoring -3 and below ranked LOW.*

This general lack of issue awareness is particularly disturbing bearing in mind that within two years most of these young people will be eligible to vote. Nor is there any justification in complacently assuming that they will acquire more knowledge of the key political issues when "they get out into the wide world". Blumler & McQuail's study shows that this is not the case.¹⁶

International Affairs

The findings here are rather mixed. Table 13, for example, demonstrates a fairly sound and widespread knowledge of the membership of the European Economic Community which is at least roughly comparable with adults' knowledge. This is perhaps not surprising since probably during the periods before and after the referendum on EEC membership many young people were exposed to both the considerable media coverage and also classroom discussion in a variety of lessons from geography to current affairs. The minor discrepancies between adults and young people in this table are not particularly significant. Eire is the only EEC member not correctly identified by the majority of pupils, whereas in the adult survey it was referred to as Ireland and this may have ensured a better response.

Table 13 Countries believed to be members of the EEC

COUNTRIES	ADOLESCENTS	ADULTS†		
United Kingdom	91%	94%		
France	90%	95%		
Belgium	82%	85%	HIGH	21%
West Germany	70%	85%		
Denmark	70%	85%		
Holland	68%	75%	MEDIUM	
Luxembourg	68%	59%	HIGH	23%
Italy	65%	75%		
Eire	46%	65%		
Soviet Union	6%	3%	MEDIUM	
Norway	34%	16%	LOW	38%
South Africa	3%	2%		
Switzerland	23%	16%		
United States	6%	6%	LOW	18%

† Source: Survey figures supplied by Social & Community Planning Research.

To some extent, however, Table 13 over-estimates the extent of knowledge of the EEC. In fact, it only shows us how many respondents know if a particular country is or is not a member state. The index accompanying this table,

provides us with a more accurate picture of their knowledge here, by showing how many EEC countries they could correctly identify.* The index shows that some 44 per cent can identify 7 or more Common Market countries (i.e. are HIGH or MEDIUM HIGH scorers) which is perhaps lower than one might expect from the data in Table 13, but on the other hand, as the reader will by now be aware, this figure is relatively high compared with knowledge of other aspects of politics and current affairs.

Knowledge of Communist countries is considerably lower. While, as Table 14 reveals, three-quarters of the sample correctly identify the Soviet Union as a Communist country, its satellites in Eastern Europe are less well-known and there is a good deal of confusion — perhaps understandably, given the somewhat ambiguous nature of some political systems — about such countries as Portugal. The general lack of knowledge here is best illustrated by the fact that when an index was constructed out of the data in Table 14, it was found that only 9 per cent correctly identified all 4 Communist countries.

Table 14 Identification of Communist Countries

Soviet Union	74%
East Germany	62%
Yugoslavia	46%
Hungary	37%
Portugal	28%
Iraq	19%
Italy	10%
Austria	10%
South Africa	7%
Sweden	5%
Switzerland	3%

Table 15 presents answers to some TRUE/FALSE questions. Responses to the first three questions show considerable ignorance of constitutional aspects of some foreign governments comparable with the ignorance revealed in the sample's answers to questions on the British Constitution. This lack of knowledge is hardly surprising. With a few honourable exceptions most of the media pay scant attention to the structure and procedure of governments in other countries.

* *Procedure: A score of +1 was given for every country in the EEC which was correctly identified and a score of -1 for each EEC member incorrectly identified, giving a maximum score of +9 and a minimum score of -9.*

However, the last two questions in Table 15, which link issues to political groups, are concerned with subjects which have received wide coverage in the media. Al Fatah, for example, were frequently in the news during 1974 and 1975 and yet less than a quarter of the sub-sample know that Al Fatah has nothing to do with black African revolutionaries, and possibly not all of these respondents actually know that it is a Palestinian movement.

For comparison I have also included in this table a question on the IRA. The almost incredible extent of political ignorance about this group suggests that poor performance on this type of question is not solely due to the fact that politics in other countries is too remote to be understood. Familiarity with the name of a group, even direct experience of such a group's activities, even massive media coverage of those activities, do not guarantee that people will know or find out what the group stands for.

Table 15 Knowledge of political procedures & issues in some other countries

QUESTIONS †	TRUE	FALSE	NS/NA
1 "Japan is now ruled by a military Government which is not elected by the people"	34%	<u>34%</u>	32%
2 "Elections for President of the USA are held every four years"	<u>48%</u>	27%	25%
3 "South Africa is no longer a member of the Commonwealth"	<u>52%</u>	23%	25%
4 "Al Fatah is a group of Black African revolutionaries opposed to the whites in South Africa"	35%	<u>20%</u>	45%
5 "The IRA is a Protestant organisation set up to prevent Ulster from being united with 'Ireland'"	44%	<u>42%</u>	14%

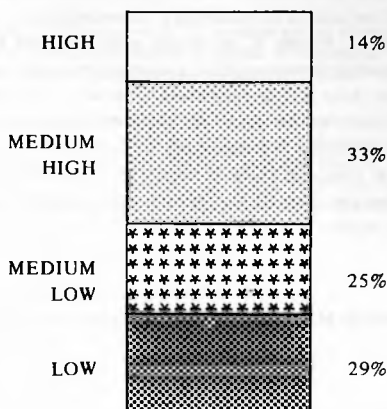
† *Correct answers are underlined.*

Finally in this section an index of international affairs was constructed out of the findings discussed in Tables 13, 14 and 15 and the results are presented in Figure 5.* Once again as with most of the other indices we find that less than a fifth of the sample are high scorers and that the majority rank low or medium low on the index.

* *Procedure: A score of +2 was given for a score of 6 or more on the index of knowledge of the EEC, +1 for a score of 4 or 5 and 0 for a score of 3 or less. A further score of +2 was given for a score of 3 or 4 on the index of knowledge of communist countries, +1 for a score of 2 or more and 0 for a score of 0 or less. Also +1 for each correct answer in Table 15.*

Figure 5

Index of International Affairs



Conclusion

The significance of these findings will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this report. It is sufficient for now to make the following points. Firstly, young people tend to be most knowledgeable about political personalities and, while it may be comforting to the three party leaders to know that they are so well-known to future voters and it may be gratifying for the media that their policy of turning politics into a gladiatorial contest has been so successful, this kind of information is not intrinsically useful for most teenagers or even the electorate in general.

Secondly, a sizeable minority have acquired some isolated and relatively inert facts about political institutions, but only a few have a realistic and well-informed picture of how the political system actually works.

I do not want to give the impression that there is no value in the political knowledge which these young people have acquired. One would, of course, expect a politically literate person to know the names of the leading politicians and to have some knowledge of the constitution, but one would also expect a politically literate person to have acquired a great deal of more important and more useful information. In fact, it is apparent that they lack much of the kind of basic information which the political consumer needs if he is to understand decisions and actions which affect him and if he is to make political choices between actions, policies, parties or candidates. One of the most disturbing findings in this chapter is their ignorance of where the political parties stand on the main issues of the day.

Generally speaking then, political ignorance is widespread in this age group. As the political indices have clearly shown, only about one-fifth to two-fifths of the sample could be said to be politically knowledgeable. Indeed this may be an over-estimate. Figure 6, in which each political knowledge index has been correlated with the other indices, demonstrates by the comparatively low correlations that there is little relationship between these areas of political knowledge. In other words, they are distinct dimensions and for young people to be knowledgeable (or ignorant) of one area of politics does not necessarily mean that they will know as much (or as little) about other aspects. In fact, less than ten per cent of the sample score highly on more than one political knowledge index.

Figure 6

Correlation Matrix of 5 Political Knowledge Indices

	Political Officeholders	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Political Issues	International Affairs
Political Officeholders	1.000				
Local Politics	.323	1.000			
Political Institutions	.251	.216	1.000		
Political Issues	.310	.245	.217	1.000	
International Affairs	.350	.291	.284	.285	1.000

Finally, it is also worth noting that the marked similarity in the levels of knowledge of adults and fifteen year-olds suggests, though does not prove, that unless we endeavour to provide them with some form of systematic political education then they are unlikely to become much more knowledgeable even when they become more directly involved in and affected by national politics as workers, voters, tax payers and house-owners. If we forget, as we commonly do, our Geography or Arithmetic, we can – in a manner of speaking – “go back to school”; but there are some things which, if not done at school, will never be learnt.

Notes:

- 1 Reported in David Butler & Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, (London: 1969), p.26.
- 2 *op.cit.* p.26.

- 3 Paul Hartmann & Charles Husband, 'The Mass Media and racial conflict' *Race*, 12 (1970-71).
- 4 See, for example, H. Behrend et al, 'A national survey of attitudes to inflation and incomes policy', *Occasional Papers in Social & Economic Administration*, no.7 (1966); and W. Belson, *The Impact of Television* (London: 1967).
- 5 See, for example, the discussion of criticisms by Crossman, Wedgewood Benn and others in J. D. Halloran, P. Elliot & G. Murdock, *Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study* (London: 1970); and Jay Blumler, "Does Mass Political Ignorance Matter?", *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 3 no.2 (1974) pp. 91-100 notes a similar tendency in the media's approach to industrial relations.
- 6 Blumler, *op.cit.* p.97.
- 7 *Gallup Political Index*, August 1975, p.12.
- 8 Butler & Stokes, *op.cit.* pp. 24-26.
- 9 *op.cit.* pp. 38-39.
- 10 Budge & Urwin for example found that only 33% could name a councillor. *Scottish Political Behaviour* (London: 1966) p.82.
- 11 B. Grant, "Young Men, the Community and Local Government", *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 3, no.3, September 1974.
- 12 See pp. 50-53.
- 13 S. E. Finer, *Anonymous Empire* (London: 1966).
- 14 The precise wording of the questions is as follows:
Gallup: "What would you say is the most urgent problem facing the country at the present time?"
Hansard: "In your opinion what is the most serious problem facing you and your generation?"
- 15 Jay Blumler & Denis McQuail, *Television in Politics*, (London: 1968) pp. 159-160.
- 16 Blumler & McQuail, *op.cit.* pp. 157-161.

POLITICAL AWARENESS and THE POLITICAL SOCIALISATION PROCESS

The process of "political socialisation" is an important dynamic element in a political system such as ours. In its widest sense it is the means by which the individual becomes acquainted with his and other systems and through a variety of agencies it determines his perception of and reaction to political phenomena. In this chapter we shall consider two aspects of this process: the sources of political information in our society and the effects of conditioning factors such as occupational class, sex, and intelligence on the individual's level of political awareness.

Sources of Political Information

The primary source of political information is, of course, the political authorities and much has been said and written by politicians (particularly when on the Backbenches), the press and academics about the need for more "Open Government". In recent years governments have, indeed, become increasingly conscious of the importance of making more information available to the public. As Brian Groombridge has observed: "There are signs that governments . . . are slowly accepting that the mythology of accountability might be a guide to practical politics. There are so many areas of life where policies simply will not work unless the people are prepared for them, properly understand them, even have an opportunity to comment on them."¹

Nevertheless, for most people, and certainly for most fifteen year-olds, political knowledge is acquired not directly but second-hand through intermediaries such as the mass media, the family, the peer group and, to a lesser extent, the school.

Tables 16-19 reflect the extent to which they use the media for acquiring political knowledge. From Table 16 it may be noted that a surprisingly large number of young people regularly read daily and Sunday newspapers. This is comparable with adults but, as Table 17 shows, most of them tend to read those newspapers which restrict the political content to a bare minimum. The quality newspapers such as *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph*, which contain two to three times as much domestic and international political, social and economic news as the tabloids such as the *Daily Mirror*, *Mail* and the *Sun*, are read by only one-in-ten of the sample.²

Table 16

Frequency of reading newspapers

D A I L I E S		S U N D A Y S	
Everyday	55%	Every Sunday	64%
4-5 times per week	13%	3 times a month	4%
2-3 times per week	11%	twice a month	2%
once a week	4%	once a month	1%
occasionally	15%	occasionally	22%
never	1%	never	6%

Table 17

Newspapers read by the sample

Daily

THE GUARDIAN	3%	THE SUN	43%
DAILY TELEGRAPH	7%	DAILY MIRROR	47%
THE TIMES	4%	DAILY EXPRESS	18%
OTHER	10%	DAILY MAIL	13%

LOCAL PAPERS 55%

Sunday

SUNDAY TIMES	8%	NEWS OF THE WORLD	41%
SUNDAY TELEGRAPH	6%	SUNDAY MIRROR	46%
OBSERVER	6%	SUNDAY PEOPLE	33%
OTHER	4%	SUNDAY EXPRESS	21%

Table 18 shows that from the point of view of frequency of use (rather than from the point of view of content or quality) the most important source appears to be television newscasts. Three-quarters of the sample are regular viewers of news broadcasts compared with less than half who regularly listen to radio newscasts. Furthermore as Table 19 demonstrates, many young people not only watch television news but also current affairs programmes. However, it is also clear that the ones which they are least likely to watch are those such as Panorama and Weekend World which attempt to discuss political issues in depth. Those current affairs programmes receiving the largest adolescent (and adult) audiences are those which tend to concentrate on the political trivia or which devote perhaps five minutes to a discussion of the latest political crisis and then quickly switch to a discussion of remedies for hay fever or a preview of the latest dress fashions, just in case the audience is getting bored.

Consequently, even though most young people are regular consumers of the media, it is questionable whether the media have an important influence on their political awareness particularly since, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, most of this age group lack a coherent framework of

political knowledge into which they can slot any new bits of information which they receive, and yet unless people have some kind of framework any attempt to inform them via the media is unlikely to meet with much success. As Jay Blumler points out, "indiscriminate attempts to transmit political information to the mass audience without regard for conditions at the receiving end could prove frustrating and self-defeating."³

Table 18 Frequency of listening & viewing news broadcasts

Television News		Radio News
54%	At least everyday	36%
21%	4-5 times per week	12%
11%	2-3 times per week	11%
1%	once a week	3%
11%	occasionally	27%
2%	never	10%

Table 19 Percentage watching Current Affairs Programmes

PANORAMA (BBC1)	11%
THIS WEEK (ITV)	29%
NATIONWIDE (BBC1)	61%
WORLD IN ACTION (ITV)	38%
MAN ALIVE (BBC2)	24%
WEEKEND WORLD (ITV)	11%
NEWSDAY (BBC2)	6%

By comparison with the media, Table 20 shows that neither parents nor friends are thought by these young people to be important sources of information. The family seems to be marginally more influential for the majority in both cases the discussion of politics is rare.

Table 20 How often do you discuss politics with parents & friends

PARENTS		FRIENDS
8%	Very often	4%
40%	Sometimes	29%
32%	Hardly ever	36%
20%	Never	30%

This finding does not necessarily mean that neither group has any influence at all on political learning. Young people may indirectly and unintentionally

acquire political information from both sources simply by overhearing conversations rather than through open discussion. A good deal of research into political socialisation has shown that children and teenagers acquire many of their political attitudes and perceptions in this way, particularly from their parents.⁴

Factors Conditioning Political Awareness

Who are the most politically aware members of this age group? Do boys know more about politics than girls? Are teenagers from middle-class homes more politically aware than their working-class counterparts? Does the type of school which they attend have any direct or indirect influence on their political knowledge? And, finally, do any of these factors outweigh intellectual ability as the prime determinant of political awareness?

These are questions which have received little attention from students of political socialisation. They have been more concerned to demonstrate the influence of such variables as sex differences, social class, type of school and intelligence on the individual's political motivations, attitudes and behaviour rather than on his or her political knowledge.

To obtain answers to the above questions respondents were therefore asked about the parents' occupations, their own educational aspirations, and the extent to which they have received any formal political education at school. Additional information was obtained about their gender and the type of school they attended. The effects which these groups and categorical differences in the sample may have on the level of quality of political knowledge are explored below.

Sex Differences

There is a considerable amount of evidence from adults surveys in Britain, and most other Western countries, that women are less interested in politics, less informed and less likely to vote than men. They also join fewer organisations, are less active in the day-to-day work of political parties and occupy significantly fewer political positions at all levels than men. In the last General Election, for example, only 7 per cent of the 2,252 candidates and 4 per cent of the elected Members of Parliament were women. Once in political office, gender also seems to influence political roles with women tending to concentrate on domestic matters such as public health, welfare, education and so on.

It is possible that these sex differences are due to some extent to the fact that the life experiences of many women are centred on home and family while the world of politics, in contrast, not only appears but actually is remote from

their lives. But, the evidence from socialisation research indicates that it is more likely that these adult experiences reinforce childhood conditioning and role training at home and in the school.

If these sex differences in political behaviour are largely due to socialisation then one might reasonably expect to find significant differences in the political knowledge of the boys compared with girls in the sample. A possible indication of this is given in the findings presented in Table 21a, which represent the number of boys and girls who are high scorers on each of the Political Knowledge indices.

Table 21a **Percentage of High Scorers on**
5 Political Knowledge Indices amongst Boys and Girls

	Political Knowledge Indices				
	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
BOYS (N = 2061)	51%	21%	15%	28%	19%
GIRLS (N = 1972)	29%	15%	8%	18%	8%

The percentage differences between boys and girls in this table are clearly in the expected direction but they are not particularly large. The one exception to this is the percentage difference in the number of high scorers on the Political Officeholders Index. The significance of this is difficult to gauge, partly because, as seen in the previous chapter, the number of high scorers on this index is much greater than on any of the other indices, and partly because the responses to questions on political officeholders were classified into three ranks rather than the four ranks employed in the other indices. Because only a small fraction of the sample are high scorers on the other indices we cannot be sure whether the relatively small differences between boys and girls in Table 21a represent a lack of association between gender and political awareness or simply a function of the small number of high scorers amongst both boys and girls.

Consequently, though comparisons of high scorers are useful indicators of sex differences (or any other group or categorical differences) it is also necessary to take account of the average and below average scorers in order to obtain an accurate picture. To do this a summary statistic was calculated to test the hypothesis that boys are more politically knowledgeable in each index than girls. The results are presented in Table 21b.

The statistic employed here is Goodman & Kruskal's 'y'. It is a particularly appropriate statistic having been specifically designed for use with ordinal data; that is, data which has been ranked on a "more or less" basis as in the case of the political knowledge indices.⁵ The upper limit of this measure is +1.0 and the lower limit is -1.0. If the coefficient is between zero and +1.0 when comparing the scores of two groups (e.g. boys and girls) on a specific index then we can say that the first-named group (i.e. boys) are more politically knowledgeable than the second-named group – at least as far as this index is concerned. The closer the coefficient is to +1.0 the greater the difference between the two groups, while conversely the closer the coefficient is to zero the smaller the difference. If the coefficient is between zero and -1.0 then the second-named group (i.e. girls) would be more politically knowledgeable on this index than boys.

Since the coefficients in Table 21b are all positive (i.e. between zero and +1.0) we can conclude that boys are indeed more politically knowledgeable than girls, particularly on the Political Officeholders and the International Affairs Indices where the coefficients are twice as large as for the remaining three indices.

Table 21b Rank Correlation Comparisons of the Political Knowledge of Boys and Girls

	Political Knowledge Indices				
	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
	Values for 'y'				
Boys : Girls	.367	.146	.180	.193	.333

Social Class Differences

Empirical research in Britain on political attitudes, knowledge or behaviour needs to take account of the influence of social class background. Adults from different social classes tend to join or support different political parties and express different political outlooks and attitudes. They also vary in the extent of their involvement and participation in politics with the middle class being markedly more interested and involved.

Class differences are also found in the political belief and behaviour of children. Several studies have demonstrated that middle-class children are more interested in politics than their working-class counterparts, and one piece of research⁶ in particular found that the average middle-class adolescent was more likely to see himself as politically efficacious or effective.

Class background also influences the rate of development of political thinking. One survey of primary schoolchildren, using an admittedly crude measure of political realism, showed that working-class children were much slower to develop a realistic view,⁷ whilst Jahoda's study of Scottish children found marked differences between middle and working-class children in the development of a sense of national consciousness.⁸

Given these variations in political development it would be reasonable to expect significant differences in the political awareness of fifteen year-olds from different class backgrounds. In order to test for this each respondent was asked to provide information about the father's job or, if not available or unknown, then the mother's job, and their answers were then classified according to the Registrar General's Classification of Occupations. At best this can only be an approximate guide to the respondent's social class for clearly the term describes a far more complex set of relationships than simply those characterised by different occupational groupings. Nevertheless, I have followed customary practice in using occupation, or parental occupation, as the main indicator of social class because it is the easiest to identify and classify.

A comprehensive profile of the social class breakdown of the sample has been provided in Appendix B but for my purposes here I have classified the students into four groups: (1) those with at least one parent in a professional or managerial occupation; (2) those with a parent in a white collar occupation; (3) those with a parent in a skilled manual job; and, finally, (4) those with a parent in a semi-skilled or unskilled occupation.

The percentage of young people in each of these categories who score high on each political knowledge index have been tabulated in Table 22a.

Table 22a Percentage of young people of different social classes scoring high on political knowledge

	Political Knowledge Indices				
	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Professional and Managerial	57%	24%	16%	35%	23%
Skilled non-manual	48%	23%	15%	29%	16%
Skilled manual	44%	21%	13%	24%	11%
Semi- and unskilled manual	36%	16%	9%	18%	12%

Table 22b **Rank Correlation Comparisons of the**
Political Knowledge of non-manual and manual classes

	Political Knowledge Indices				
	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
	Values for 'y'				
Non-manual :					
Manual	.260	.197	.189	.099	.233

The differences in Table 22a are in the expected direction in that for all five indices children from the professional and managerial class are more likely to be high scorers than those from a skilled non-manual background, who are more likely to be high scorers than those from a skilled manual background, and they, in turn, are more likely to be high scorers than those from the semi- and unskilled manual class. However, the percentage differences between these four categories are not very great. The average percentage difference in these indices between the professional-managerial and the semi- and unskilled manual groups is only 13 per cent.

The values for Goodman & Kruskal's 'y' in Table 22b compare pupils from non-manual and manual backgrounds and although the coefficients are all positive, supporting the hypothesis that the first-named group are more politically-knowledgeable than the others, they are also small. Indeed, on average, they are smaller than the coefficients comparing boys with girls in Table 21b.

To summarise, it is apparent that social class as measured by parental occupation has some effect on the political awareness of the child but the effect is not significant.

Type of School

It is difficult to isolate the indirect effect of the educational system on the development of political awareness from the effects of intelligence and home background but there is some evidence that pupils attending selective Grammar schools have a stronger sense of their own political competence, expect or anticipate greater opportunities for wielding political influence, and exhibit a stronger attachment to liberal-democratic beliefs and values than pupils attending secondary modern and comprehensive schools.⁹

Tables 23a and b show that there are also differences in the levels of political knowledge of selective and non-selective pupils. The percentage differences

between pupils in Secondary Modern schools and both types of Comprehensive are minimal, and the preponderance of negative correlations for these three types of school in Table 23b is further evidence that most of these pupils are average or below average performers on the political knowledge tests. In contrast, the coefficients comparing Grammar pupils with the rest are clearly positive and generally higher than for comparisons between boys and girls, and non-manual and manual classes.

It is by no means clear whether these differences are due to differences in the nature of the general education provided in Grammar schools compared with the rest or to the selection process itself which ensures that such schools have a higher proportion of intellectually able pupils than the rest. Possibly the differences are due to a combination of both factors with other possible factors not accounted for in this survey. However, it is interesting to note that in the following section level of educational attainment is at least as significant a determinant of the level of political knowledge as attendance at a selective school.

Table 23a **Percentage of pupils in different types of school scoring high on political knowledge**

	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issues Awareness	International Affairs
Grammar	59%	25%	19%	35%	19%
Non-coexisting Comprehensive	39%	19%	11%	23%	14%
Coexisting Comprehensive	36%	18%	11%	21%	14%
Secondary Modern	37%	15%	9%	21%	11%

Table 23b **Rank correlation comparisons of the political knowledge of pupils attending different types of school**

	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Values for 'y'					
Grammar : rest	.412	.266	.335	.364	.121
Non-coexisting Comprehensive : rest	-.035	.052	.014	-.039	-.021
Coexisting Comprehensive : rest	-.082	-.043	-.048	-.061	-.047
Secondary Modern : rest	-.089	-.143	-.136	-.087	-.084

Educational Aspirations

For reasons too numerous to discuss here, no direct measure of intelligence was included in this study. Nevertheless, one would expect this to be an important influence on the development of political awareness in the individual. To give some indication of the extent of its influence a very rough-and-ready measure was adopted based on whether or not the individual child intended staying on at school until eighteen-plus. Intended school-leaving age is an approximate indicator of educational aspiration which in turn correlates highly with achievement motivation and with performance on intelligence tests.¹⁰

Comparisons between the performance on the political knowledge tests of those intending to stay on at school until eighteen and those intending to leave at sixteen are presented in Tables 24a and b.

Table 24a **Percentage of pupils scoring high on political knowledge, by School Leaving Age**

	Political Knowledge Indices				
	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Leaves at eighteen:	59%	26%	19%	36%	23%
Leaves at sixteen:	36%	16%	9%	19%	11%

Table 24b **Rank correlation comparisons of the political knowledge of pupils leaving school**

	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Leave at 18 :					
Leave at 16	.436	.275	.360	.411	.379

It is apparent from both the percentage of high scorers in Table 24a and from the coefficients in 24b that the adolescent who leaves school once he or she has attained the legal minimum age is, on average, less likely to fare well on tests of political knowledge. There is a marked difference on each Index between them and those intending to stay on until eighteen or nineteen. Not only are the coefficients in Table 24b all positive, they are also larger than the coefficients comparing any two of the other groups described above.

Political Education

The impact of education has been considered in terms of educational aspirations and, at least implicitly, educational attainment, and in terms of variations in the organisation and academic characteristics of different types of school. Nothing has yet been said about the political relevance of what is taught in these establishments and, in particular, the relevance of formal political education. The kind of systematic teaching of politics which has long been provided at the secondary level in the United States, West Germany, the Netherlands and some other western European countries has been relatively neglected in the United Kingdom. Perhaps until recently it was not thought necessary except during periods of national crisis such as the Second World War. However, during this last decade an increasing number of schools and colleges have started to include political studies as an examinable subject in the curriculum and also as a non-examinable component of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary subjects such as Social Studies, Humanities, General Studies, Liberal Studies and Modern Studies.¹¹

It is not yet possible to reliably estimate how many pupils receive some formal political education or how many schools and colleges teach it. Figures can be obtained from Examining Boards concerning the provision of politics as an examinable subject but there are no corresponding figures available for the provision of politics as a component of a wider syllabus. New Society conducted a general survey of social studies which found that more schools taught politics through a social studies programme than as a specialist subject but this survey was carried out in 1964 before the move to introduce political studies into secondary schools had gathered impetus. It is therefore not possible to say with any certainty if the 37 per cent of the sample who indicated that they have studied some kind of politics at school is representative of the national picture or not. The 37 per cent concerning us here are those pupils who say that they are studying or have studied some kind of politics at school, including those studying British Government and politics, Current Affairs, Public Affairs/Administration, Citizenship/Civics, and American Politics.

Tables 25a and b reveal the rather surprising finding that those pupils who have received some formal political education at school appear to fare little better on the political knowledge tests than those who have not. The percentage differences between the high scorers in Table 25a are so small as to be of little significance — the average percentage difference between the two groups is less than 4 per cent.

Table 25a **Percentage of high scorers on political knowledge receiving and not receiving Political Education**

	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Politics lessons	44%	19%	14%	27%	16%
None	39%	17%	11%	22%	13%

Table 25b **Comparisons of rank correlations on political knowledge indices of those taught politics with rest**

	Political Office	Local Politics	Political Institutions	Issue Awareness	International Affairs
Some politics lessons : None	.103	.068	.112	.094	.115

When we include the average and low scorers the picture does not change. The coefficients in Table 25b are positive but the correlations are very low on all five indices. This is perhaps not surprising in the case of issue awareness or knowledge of international affairs since these tend to be aspects of politics which are rarely taught either at the examination or the non-examination level, but it is surprising to find such small differences in knowledge of political institutions and local politics, both of which are frequently taught in politics lessons.

However, it is worth noting that this lack of differentiation between the two groups seems to confirm other research which has been conducted both in Britain and the United States. Research in the 1950s and 1960s found that the quantity of work done in civics and social studies in New York, Syracuse and Kansas was not reflected in changed "citizenship" attitudes.¹² Langton and Kent Jennings' national survey of the political knowledge and attitudes of American adolescents found that high school civics courses had little or no influence on students' political knowledge and attitudes. As in Tables 25a and b such students were marginally more likely to be knowledgeable and to be interested in politics but the correlations were very low and most, according to the authors, "bordered on the trivial".¹³

In Scotland the impact of the Modern Studies course, which presents a problem-oriented approach to contemporary affairs, has been investigated by Geoffrey Mercer. His research casts doubts on whether Modern Studies in its present form is able to fulfil its objectives. Modern Studies, he argues, "acts

to reinforce advantages already held by some pupils which enable them to be more advanced in the development of political awareness. Thus, those already predisposed to be relatively more attentive to political matters are further hastened along this same path.”¹⁴

It would be misleading to make direct comparisons between the English findings and the Scottish and American surveys. It must be remembered that the evidence about political education in the English schools is obtained from the pupils not the schools or education authorities and it was not possible to check their answers or find out more about the type and quality of political education which these young people receive. No information was obtained about course content or teaching methods in each school and since there is no standardisation of course syllabuses to meet the requirements of a national examination it is clear that there may be wide differences between the schools in the sample in content and quality of politics teaching. It is therefore difficult to draw any generalised conclusions from these findings. All that can be said is that this survey leads one to doubt if much of the political education provided in schools today is contributing to the development of students' political literacy.

However, even if this view of contemporary political education is correct, this does not mean that the teaching of politics before the age of sixteen is necessarily a futile exercise. Further investigation is needed on the effects of different teaching methods and different course content. It may simply be that for many young people the content of such courses does not appear to be relevant to their lives or is presented to them in such a way that it appears irrelevant.

It is apparent from the findings discussed in this chapter that teachers are likely to get a better response from their students if in designing politics courses they take into account not only the age and intellectual capacities of their pupils but also the social context in which their pupils live. As Harold Entwistle observes: “teachers of politics are not writing political facts and ideas upon a tabula rasa and in order to be effective, educational procedures must take account of the way in which the child is acculturised apart from his experience in school.”¹⁵ It is not so much that young people will have acquired some political knowledge before the politics teacher encounters them — we have already seen that most pick up the barest minimum of political information — it is that they come to the classroom with firmly entrenched political attitudes and prejudices including, as Chapter 5 demonstrates, cynical and apathetic views of the political arena, their own views of what politics is all about, and an awareness, however uninformed, of their own interests. Such factors also need to be kept in mind by the teacher if their interest and imagination is to be captured and developed.

Notes:

- 1 Brian Groombridge, *Television and the People*, (London: 1972), p.94.
- 2 These proportions are based on the figures given by Raymond Williams in *Communications*, (London: 1968), Ch. III.
- 3 Jay Blumler, "Does Mass Political Ignorance Matter?" *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 3 no.2, pp. 91-100 (1974).
- 4 See, for example, the review of the American literature in James C. Davies, "The Family's Role in Political Socialisation" in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science*, 361 (1965), pp. 11-19. For Britain it is interesting to compare the different conclusions of R. Dowse & J. Hughes, "The Family, The School and the Political Socialisation Process", *Sociology*, 5 (1971) and Frank Parkin's *Middle Class Radicalism*, (Manchester 1968).
- 5 Leo A. Goodman & William H. Kruskal, "Measures of Association for Cross Classification" *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, XLIX (1954) pp. 732-64; 'y' is a symmetrical measure of association for comparing the scores of different variables, groups or categories on ordinal scales and indices.
- 6 P. Abramson, "The differential political socialisation of English secondary school students", *Sociology of Education* (40) 1967, pp. 246-69.
- 7 F. Greenstein, V. Herman, R. Stradling & E. Zureik, "Queen and Prime Minister — the Child's Eye View", *New Society*, 14 (1969), pp. 635-8.
- 8 G. Jahoda, "The development of children's ideas about country and nationality", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 33 (1963), pp. 47-60, 143-53.
- 9 Abramson, *op.cit.*
- 10 I. R. Bruckmann, "The relationship between achievement motivation and sex, age, social class, school stream and intelligence", *British Journal of social and clinical Psychology*, 5 (1966), pp. 211-220.
- 11 Ian Lister, "The aims and methods of Political Education in Schools", paper presented to the conference on the Development of Democratic Institutions in Europe, organised by the Council of Europe; Strasbourg, 1976, p.11.
- 12 F. Patterson *et.al.*, *The Adolescent Citizenship*, (New York: 1960), pp.71-73; F. A. Price, "Citizenship Studies in Syracuse", and E. E. Edgar, "Kansas Study of Education for Citizenship" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 33 (1951), pp. 175-181.
- 13 K. P. Langton & M. Kent Jennings, "Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum in the United States", *American Political Science Review*, 62 (1968), pp. 852-867.
- 14 G. Mercer, "Political Interest among adolescents: the influence of formal political education", in *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 1, no.2 (1972). See also the more complete version: *Political Education and Socialization to Democratic Norms*, Occasional Paper No. 11, Survey Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, 1973.
- 15 H. Entwistle, *Political education in a democracy*, (London: 1971).

THE USE OF POLITICALLY RELEVANT SKILLS

In the opening chapter it was emphasised that the political knowledge component of political literacy is not confined to propositional knowledge and that it also includes what might be called political 'know-how': that is, for example, being able to understand and, above all, to *use* political concepts to assess political situations and to justify solutions to those situations; being able to construct reasoned arguments based on the information available; knowing how to settle disputes, and knowing alternative ways of political influence in our society.

Such forms of knowledge are not easily measured by a questionnaire. Direct observation, depth interviews and even essays are in some ways more appropriate methods for assessing these skills; but none of these methods are practical for a national survey and, as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, the questionnaire can provide some interesting indications of cognitive skills and even, to a lesser extent, action skills.

Cognitive Skills

To examine some of the cognitive skills of these young people it was decided to use a modified version of a projective technique developed by Joseph Adelson and his colleagues at the University of Michigan.¹ They presented a sample of adolescents between the ages of eleven and eighteen with a series of conflict situations and asked the subjects to resolve the conflicts and to justify their solutions. The situations included conflicts over a law enforcing vaccination for all children, a minimum education law, and a conflict between landowner and the council.

Using Adelson's approach as a base, the following situations involving conflict were developed:

- # 1. "When a well-known and very controversial politician was invited to give a speech at a public meeting, the Chief Constable told the organisers that they should cancel the meeting because he felt that there was a risk of violence breaking out between groups of people with different opinions."
- # 2. "When the Bournemouth Town Council decided to build a new by-pass road they started buying land, but although they were offering what they thought was a fair price, one man refused to sell his land. The

Council met to discuss the situation but they could not agree about what should be done."

- # 3. "When a report showed that too many people were being killed in motorbike accidents the Government decided that in future everyone riding a motorbike must wear a crash helmet. Some people said that they would refuse to obey this law. In their opinion the Government did not have the right to make them wear crash helmets."

After each situation the students were then asked, firstly, to say what they think should be done (or, in the case of # 3, they were asked to justify their statements. By getting them to exercise their political judgment in this way it was thought that they would demonstrate the extent to which they could construct a reasoned argument; use facts to explain their statements, and also use political concepts or principles in their justifications.

Although the main emphasis will be placed on an analysis of respondents' political judgments, it is worth dwelling briefly on the solutions which they offered to these conflict situations. Adelson and his colleagues found in the United States that while the younger adolescents usually support the individual against the Government, yet from the ages of 13-15 they begin to give greater priority to the needs of the community as a whole. This tendency is also evident in this British sample. Nearly two-thirds of the sample stress the importance of the welfare of the community over the rights and freedom of the individual — a surprisingly high figure bearing in mind the high value traditionally given to the rights of the individual in English political thought. One of the situations (# 2) focusses on a conflict of interest rather than values and here it is interesting to note that all but a small minority reject extreme solutions such as the use of force by the Council to obtain the land or the use of threats by the landowner. Most favour some kind of compromise or political solution, suggesting that both parties to the dispute should meet and negotiate an agreement. When asked why they had chosen this particular solution, in other words, when asked to justify their answers, we find in Table 26 a rather mixed response. Most of them attempted to justify their solutions to situation # 3 but the response rate is lower for the other two situations. It is interesting to note that the situation receiving the highest response rate is the one which seems to have the most immediate appeal to young people. Many of them are reaching the age when they can ride and even own motorbikes or have friends who ride them, so as such the question may be seen as having greater relevance to them than, say, a dispute over the ownership of land.

Apart from those who attempt to justify their answers and those who do not even attempt to answer, two other kinds of response were also noted. On the one hand some respondents simply re-state the answer they have already

given. For example, when asked to explain in # 1 why the meeting should be cancelled they tend to respond "because I think it shouldn't go on" or some similar non-reason. Others, instead of offering reasons repeat or paraphrase what has been presented to them in the passages in the questionnaire as if it were a kind of comprehension exercise. This form of response may be connected with what Bernstein terms a "restricted code" — an impoverished vocabulary, a poor range of syntactical constructions, and a tendency not to use dependent and relative clauses — and this will be looked at in more detail later in this chapter.²

Table 26 Respondents' justifications of their political solutions

	Conflict Situations		
	Item # 1	Item # 2	Item # 3
Offers justification	56%	32%	69%
Re-states answer	13%	36%	9%
Paraphrases question	4%	2%	5%
No response	27%	30%	17%

The answers classified as "justifications" were further analysed in terms of their style of political thinking and the mode of reasoning, if any, employed by each respondent. Table 27 shows the differences in style. Adelson and O'Neil found that the most common style of political thought amongst 11 year-olds is a personalised one. This, they argue, is due to a failure to attain a sociocentric perspective. At this age they rarely appraise political events in the light of their collective consequences. Instead they see events as either serving the needs of individuals or as having consequences for individuals. Thus in their item on whether there should be a law requiring all children to be vaccinated, they found that the majority of 11 year-olds emphasised that the law provides personal protection from disease. By the age of 13 there is a shift in emphasis and greater stress is placed on the protection of the community through such a law.

However, Table 27 shows that the personalised style of thought is by no means limited to eleven year-olds. Some fifteen year-olds also adopt this way of looking at political events. This is not to say that they are therefore incapable of sociocentric perspective. This may or may not be the case. The stage theories of cognitive psychologists, such as Piaget and Adelson, should not be taken too literally. Some adolescents may acquire sociocentric thought before the age postulated by stage theorists, others later and some not at all.

Those who stress the personal in their answers to # 1 tend to see the situation from the point of view of the Chief Constable or the politician. One secondary

modern pupil gives an answer which is typical of this group when he writes (having previously indicated that the meeting should go on) that: "if the meeting were stopped it might damage the politician's reputation with the people. They would say he's scared." A grammar schoolgirl shows not only a personalised style of thinking but a good deal of imagination as she delves into the motives of the Chief Constable. Answering the question as if it were a story-completion test she writes that the meeting should go on because "The Chief Constable was against the well-known politician and it was just his reason for getting the meeting stopped."

Table 27 Styles of Political Thinking

	Item # 1	Item # 2	Item # 3
Personalised justifications	11%	2%	21%
Pragmatic justifications	11%	11%	19%
Justifications on principle	32%	18%	28%

A roughly similar group offer pragmatic justifications. That is, they concern themselves with the particular problems of resolving the conflict. For example, in answering # 2 one boy writes: "supposedly the road is vital for some reason for it would not be a good idea to drop the plan straight away. To try and force him off his land would bring about a public row and so if the road is really necessary and cannot be re-routed they should offer more money but do so discreetly to prevent any other trouble." Note here the concern not so much with the principle of the thing or with the individuals involved but with the logistics – the practicalities – of the problem. Other pragmatists refer to the bad publicity which the council would get if it tried to force a man off his land, and yet others point to the expense of taking a man to Court. We find pragmatic solutions to the other two situations also. A number of young people in answering # 1 concentrate on the strategy which the police should adopt to prevent trouble rather than the importance of law and order or free speech, and so on, and a typical response to # 3 is that people should be made to wear crash helmets because "the person (injured through not wearing a helmet) would require medical treatment if hurt and this costs much time, money and inconvenience that could have probably been saved."

A third group of respondents spontaneously introduce political principles or concepts into their justifications. Some do this explicitly by actually referring to principles such as freedom, rights, justice and order while others show by their answers that they have grasped the meaning of these terms even if they do not specify them by name. In answers to # 1 respondents showed some understanding of such concepts as force, authority, rule of law, democracy, individual rights, tolerance and, most frequently, free speech and law and order. In # 2 we find an understanding of welfare, individual rights, justice

as fairness, democracy, force and compromise. And in # 3 we find concepts such as freedom, rights, welfare, force and the rule of law.

There is then some basis for believing that a political education for fifteen year-olds does not have to be confined to the inculcation of factual knowledge. It could or should be possible to provide these young people with some understanding and some capacity for using the basic political concepts which are at the heart of most political disputes. However, it must also be stressed that these concepts and principles are never employed by more than one-third of the entire sample and while it is possible that more pupils are capable of employing principles in their explanations than are shown in Table 27 it is highly unlikely on the basis of the findings presented here, that the majority of young people have, as yet, the capacity to handle abstractions of this nature and it is open to conjecture whether they will ever have the capacity to understand second and third level political concepts such as democracy or representation.

Finally, the responses were also analysed according to the mode of reasoning employed and the results are presented in Table 28. In all, three distinctive modes of reasoning were detected. The first, for want of a better word, is empirical. That is to say the individual reasons from his own experience or from the experiences of someone he knows. Not surprisingly it is in answers to # 3 where this mode of reasoning is most apparent. A secondary modern pupil favours the compulsory wearing of crash helmets "because a mate of mine had a crash on his bike and would have broke his neck if he wasn't wearing one". While another boy in the same school argues from personal experience against crash helmets "because they are uncomfortable and its difficult to see where you are going in the rain and if you get in an accident the chin strap could kill you".

The second mode of reasoning is the consequential one, in which the respondent is able to discuss the implications or consequences of various courses of action. Not surprisingly there is a considerable overlap between the pragmatic style of political thought and the consequential mode of reasoning. The two are likely to be found together, but not necessarily. Both the examples of pragmatic thinking given above exhibit consequential reasoning, but perhaps the latter is best illustrated by the following quotation from the answer given by a girl who argues that the Council must force the man to accept the price offered (indeed she has noted in the margin that they should put a compulsory purchase order on the land) "because giving him more money would mean that this would also have to be done in other cases (more people seeing that they can get more money for their land if they refuse to sell). Ultimately, this would mean an increase in rates since the Council would be spending more money."

This kind of cost-effectiveness approach is the form of consequential reasoning most usually applied. In answers to # 3, for example, there are frequent references to the costs of medical treatment and the consequent burden placed on the tax-payer by people seriously injured through failure to wear a crash helmet.

The third mode of reasoning discernable in their answers is the deductive mode in which they deduce specific choices from general principles. Again there is likely to be a considerable overlap between those employing principles in their style of thought and those using deductive modes of reasoning, but not necessarily so. The following quote from an answer to # 3 (by a girl in a non-coexisting comprehensive) illustrates this kind of reasoning: "I believe in man's freedom of choice. It's the same with smoking, committing suicide, etc. provided it only involves the one person concerned, then it's OK so let them go ahead."

Table 28	Modes of Reasoning		
	Item # 1	Item # 2	Item # 3
No mode	47%	69%	34%
Empirical	6%	1%	17%
Consequential	14%	12%	20%
Deductive	33%	18%	29%

It should be noted here that although it is deductive reasoning which is the one most likely to be used here, it should not be regarded as superior to consequential reasoning. Both modes are essential to what Piaget calls "formal operations" and, as Adelson & O'Neil point out, the ability to utilise both deductive and consequential reasoning is essential if the individual is to escape "that compulsion toward the immediate, the tangible, the narrowly pragmatic which so limits the political discourse of younger adolescents."³

On the evidence presented above it is reasonable to argue that it is not just the younger adolescents whose political discourse is limited. This is also true for many fifteen year-olds who without these cognitive skills are unlikely to understand much of the political activity occurring at local, national and international levels. It was noted earlier that this failure to use these particular cognitive skills seems to be an instance of the kind of speech behaviour which Bernstein calls "a restricted code". Such a language code, according to Bernstein, is associated with "a relatively low level of conceptualisation; an orientation to a low order of causality; a disinterest in processes; a preference to be aroused by, and respond to, that which is immediately given, rather than to the implications of a matrix of relationships."⁴

Klein, in her discussion of Bernstein's work, has observed another aspect of the restricted code which is the lack of role playing.⁵ This has particularly important consequences for political discourse. For young people to understand political situations and to be able to empathise or see the situation from more than one point of view they need to be able to put themselves into someone else's shoes, and yet, as we have seen, the political situation which presents the greatest problems of understanding for them is the conflict between the landowner and the town council (# 2) and a number of teenagers said that they didn't know what would happen in a situation like this and therefore could not answer the question.

The restricted code of speech is not peculiar to the working-class – it is used in any social context where identification with other members of a social grouping is important – but whereas many working-class children learn only the restricted code most middle-class children, according to Bernstein, also learn to use elaborated codes of speech in appropriate contexts such as the school. If this is the case then we would expect to find class differences in the development and use of the kind of politically-relevant skills discussed in this Chapter. Table 29 compares the skills of young people from different occupational class backgrounds. Three sets of figures are presented here. The first row shows the percentage of young people in each class who are capable of justifying their solutions to all three conflict situations (# 1, # 2, # 3). The second row shows the percentage adopting a sociocentric view either by justifying themselves on impersonal, pragmatic terms or on the basis of political principles. And, finally, in the third row, we have the percentage of young people employing consequential or deductive modes of reasoning in their answers.

Table 29 The percentage of young people from different social class backgrounds using politically-relevant skills

	Middle Class	Working Class	Chi Square (1 d.f.)
Ability to justify political solutions	62%	52%	$\chi^2 = 26.840$ p. > .001
Capacity to adopt a sociocentric point of view	48%	40%	$\chi^2 = 28.484$ p. > .001
Ability to use consequential and/or deductive modes of reasoning	52%	41%	$\chi^2 = 31.136$ p. > .001

It is clear from Table 29 that the percentage differences are in the expected direction. Middle-class adolescents are more likely than working-class adolescents to employ these cognitive skills to solve political problems and, as may be seen from the Chi squares in the extreme right hand column, the differences between the two groups are statistically significant. However, two qualifications are worth making. Firstly, at least a third of the middle-class fail to use these skills and therefore the problem is not simply limited to the working class. Secondly, failure to use these skills in justifying their political solutions does not necessarily signify absence of such skills. It may, for example, signify that this type of question does not always succeed in tapping what it is designed to measure. This could only have been checked by follow-up interviews but these were beyond the scope of this survey.

The cognitive skills described in this chapter are frequently associated with the kind of academic education characteristically provided in Grammar schools and the academic streams of those Comprehensives which have not changed over to mixed ability teaching. It was not possible to take account of streaming in Comprehensives but an indication of the relationship between these skills and an academic education may be observed in Table 30.

Table 30 Percentage of young people in different types of school using politically-relevant skills

	Grammar	Rest	Chi Square
Ability to justify political solutions	64%	50%	$\chi^2 = 33.393$ p. > .001
Capacity to adopt a sociocentric point of view	51%	39%	$\chi^2 = 25.613$ p. > .001
Ability to use consequential and/or deductive modes of reasoning	55%	40%	$\chi^2 = 37.065$ p. > .001

Again the percentage differences are in the expected direction and statistically significant but again also it is interesting to note that over one-third of the Grammar school pupils fail to use these skills to explain themselves. Many of them at sixteen are still adopting an egocentric, personalised style of thinking and do not identify the consequences of actions which they recommend.

The implications of these findings for the teaching of politics and, in particular, the enhancement of political literacy through formal teaching programmes

need to be examined. The student who is limited to the restricted code is likely to have difficulty with teaching methods and aspects of the curriculum which require him or her to comprehend and make use of generalisations and abstract ideas and understand processes and relationships.

Now clearly the concept of political literacy as described earlier, and in greater detail in the working papers of the Programme for Political Education, presupposes to some extent the use of an "elaborated code" by the student. The politically literate person so described would, for example, understand and use those political concepts minimally necessary to construct simple conceptual and analytical frameworks; he or she would be a rational thinker and capable of critically analysing and evaluating political information; would be able to offer justifications and reasons for his or her own views and understand the justifications and reasons given by others.

Consequently there is always the possibility that teachers in attempting to develop political literacy in the classroom may be using an elaborated code of language for which many of their pupils have no equivalent response. This could result in a breakdown of communication between teacher and pupils. Many teachers are aware of this problem of course and attempt to create the conditions which will permit the maximum degree of communication in the classroom, and it should also be pointed out that this problem is not peculiar to political education alone. But it does also suggest that the success of teaching programmes in politics may be dependent upon the form and quality of general education within the school.

Action Skills

We turn now to consider some aspects of young people's action skills, but there are several difficulties involved in assessing them. Firstly, there are not many situations in the lives of most fifteen year-olds in which they can act politically, and these will tend to be in their immediate environment. Some may participate in decision-making in the home; far fewer will be able to participate in making effective decisions within their school, and even fewer will have had direct experience of attempting to influence political decisions at the local or national levels. Secondly, it is difficult to assess the action skills which they may have acquired through participation in these political and para-political situations. The most appropriate method is direct observation of actual situations or simulations. The written questionnaire is limited here. Direct questions can be asked about political activity in the family and school, but it is only possible to ask projective questions about

local and national political situations; i.e. What would you do if . . . ? Or, What would you advise if . . . ? And, finally, political activity in any form tends to be looked on by some teachers and LEAs as a 'hot potato'. Objections were raised by some about questions on participation in schools (a possible threat to the teachers' authority) and one LEA also objected to questions about home life. Thus, to some extent the two questions which were eventually asked in the survey about the family and the school were compromises. The first asked the sample to assess their influence on family decisions and the second asked them whether they feel free to talk and discuss problems with their teachers. The two questions give an indication of the social competence of respondents which, it has been argued, may be an important factor in determining whether they will have influence in more directly political situations. Their responses are presented in Table 31.⁶

Table 31 **Social competence & participation**

Influence on family decisions		Influence with teachers	
A lot	24%	Feel free to talk	50%
Some	53%	Not free to talk	24%
None	5%	Not sure	26%
Not sure	17%		

Clearly half the sample appear to have a general sense of social competence within the family and the school and the 77 per cent claiming influence within the family is higher than the adults in the Civic Culture survey who were asked if they could remember how influential they had been in the family when young.⁷

Table 32 shows the sample's answers to a projective question asking them to suggest strategies which they and their families could adopt to influence a decision made by the local council. This question was appended to situation # 2 in the previous section. Having asked them about the conflict between the council and the landowner they were then asked what they would do if the council tried to build a new road through their home. Their responses are tabulated in the first column. They were then asked what advice they would give if the first strategy did not work and the answers to this may be found in the second column.

Table 32 Strategies for influencing a Local Council decision

ACTIONS	1st choice	2nd choice	Adults*
ENLIST THE AID OF OTHERS:			
Organise or join a pressure group	15%	10%	
Organise or join a protest march	4%	11%	
Petition the Council	17%	13%	
Petition the Government	7%	12%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	43%	46%	34%
ACT ALONE:			
Complain to the local MP	23%	12%	
Complain to local planning dept.	12%	6%	
Complain to the local Councillor	7%	4%	
Write to a local newspaper	3%	11%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	45%	33%	41%
DO NOTHING:			
You cannot change official plans	4%	1%	
<i>Total</i>	92%	80%	75%

* Source: G. Almond & S. Verba, *Civic Culture*, (Boston: 1965) p.148)

Influencing a political decision depends upon knowledge. That is, knowledge of who made or makes the decision and where they can be contacted; knowledge of the alternative strategies open to the individual for influencing that decision; knowledge of which strategies are most appropriate and likely to be most effective in certain circumstances; and so on.

The first column of figures in Table 31 shows that most young people in the sub-sample are capable of thinking of at least one possible and plausible strategy for trying to change the local council's plans. The non-response rate is low and only 1 in 20 believes that no strategy would work. The non-response rate increases when they are asked for an alternative strategy but not greatly so.

The first column also reveals that for those who would act alone the most frequently mentioned strategy is to complain to their local member of Parliament. Indeed this heads the list of alternatives for the whole sample. They are far more likely to complain to their MP than to the Council responsible for the decision or to the local planning department. The Granada/NOP survey asked a similar question to the one reported here and also found that the MP was named more often than the councillor, a government department or the local authority department. According to one political commentator this shows that people see the main function of MPs as that of prosecuting causes and airing grievances on their behalf.⁸

It is interesting to note that whereas in the first column the sample is equally divided as to whether to act alone or enlist the aid of others in the neighbourhood, the number suggesting individual action declines markedly when asked for an alternative strategy. Almond and Verba, who used a similar question to this, have argued that the individual who mentions getting others to help him in his dispute believes himself to be more influential than those who act alone. This is questionable. It seems more reasonable — at least on this side of the Atlantic — to assume that the individual who acts alone believes himself to be more influential than those who act in concert, i.e. he believes he doesn't need any help. However, neither the Hansard survey nor the Civic Culture survey provide definitive proof for either proposition. Nevertheless, given the nature of national and local politics, it is reasonable to assume that the individual who enlists the aid of others in his cause will in reality have more influence than the one who acts alone; and there is clear evidence here that at least two-fifths of the sample are aware of this.⁹

The overall impression gained from these findings is that most of these young people have some knowledge of alternative strategies. Four-fifths of the sample could think of at least two possible strategies for influencing a local government decision and this compares favourably with the adult respondents in Almond and Verba's Civic Culture survey.

However, it should be remembered that this question only measures *knowledge* of alternative means of influence and possibly also a propensity to act — although even this is open to question. The responses do not and could not tell us if these young people would in fact act in this way or even advise their parents to take such actions if they actually encountered a similar situation to this. The literature on political socialisation is already full of dubious attempts to predict adult political behaviour from political learning without providing evidence of a link between the two and further indulgence in this kind of speculation would be unwarranted here.¹⁰ It is sufficient to note that the large proportion of adults

in the Civic Culture survey who felt able to influence the decisions of the local government was not matched by actual political behaviour. Only a small proportion had actually attempted to use such methods to affect decisions and even if the majority did try to wield some influence it is extremely unlikely that they would meet with much success. Generally speaking, within our society only a comparatively small minority of people obtain access to the more effective channels of influence and an even smaller number have the ability or the opportunity to wield influence without resorting to the normal channels.

Notes:

- 1 J. Adelson & R. P. O'Neil, "Growth of Political Ideas in Adolescence: The Sense of Community" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4 (1966) pp. 295-306.
- 2 See, for example, B. Bernstein "Social Class and linguistic development" in A. H. Halsey, J. Floud & C. A. Anderson (eds.) *Education, Economy & Society*, (London: 1961), pp. 288-314.
- 3 *op.cit.* p.63.
- 4 Basil Bernstein, "Social class and linguistic development: a theory of social learning", in A. H. Halsey, J. Floud & C. A. Anderson (eds.) *Education, Economy & Society*, (1961), p.302.
- 5 J. Klein, *Samples from English Cultures*, (London: 1965), pp. 517-26.
- 6 G. Almond & S. Verba, *Civic Culture*, (Princeton: 1965, abridged edition), Ch. XI.
- 7 *op.cit.* Comparable figures for adults is 69%.
- 8 David McKie, *The Guardian*, 23rd July, 1973.
- 9 Almond & Verba, *op.cit.* pp. 145ff.
- 10 The tendencies to make unfounded speculations about the link between early learning and adult political behaviour and to predict future behaviour from current attitudes are criticised by a number of political scientists in Volume 1 of the *British Journal of Political Science* (1971).

CHAPTER 5

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

It was only possible to include a few questions on political attitudes partly because the main purpose of this survey was the assessment of political knowledge, and also because there were strict limitations imposed on the size and scope of the questionnaire by the amount of time head teachers were willing to allot to this kind of extra-curricular event, and by the degree of attention which most fifteen year-olds are willing or able to give to something like this. It was therefore decided that it would not be feasible to include attitude scales, questions measuring the kind of procedural values such as freedom, toleration, fairness, respect for truth and respect for reasoning which the Programme for Political Education recommends for inclusion in any teaching programme aimed at enhancing political literacy. Instead I have concentrated on examining those attitudes which are in some way related to the individual's political knowledge. Particularly relevant here are their attitudes to politics itself. Are they interested in politics and current affairs? Do they feel competent to understand political matters? What are their attitudes to politicians and political parties? and so on.

It is patently obvious that without some motivation to absorb information most people will remain relatively ignorant of politics and although there are other strong motivating forces which stimulate us to amass knowledge, such as self-interest or the desire to pass examinations, the importance of a basic interest in politics for the development of political knowledge should not be overlooked. However, as we can see in Table 33 only a few young people are very interested in politics and less than half of the sample express any interest at all.

Table 33 Political Interest

Very interested	7%
Fairly interested	37%
Not very interested	41%
Not at all interested	14%
Total	99%

It could be argued that this low figure is only to be expected since for most young people the world of national and international politics is remote and would not seem to have any relevance to their lives until they take on adult responsibilities and yet a number of adult surveys have shown an equally

widespread degree of political disinterest. Butler and Stokes, for example, found that only 11 per cent of adults followed politics very closely and over half the sample hardly paid any attention to it.¹

Coupled with this widespread lack of interest is an equally general lack of a sense of personal political effectiveness.² This is usually measured by some kind of political efficacy or political anomie scales but, as previously mentioned, there was insufficient space in the questionnaire for such scales. Nevertheless one question was included from these scales and the answers to it are given in Table 34.

Table 34 "Politics is too complicated to understand"

Strongly Agree	16%
Agree	36%
Disagree	20%
Strongly Disagree	9%
Not sure	19%

That only 29 per cent disagree with the statement "politics is too complicated to understand" indicates that only a small minority of the sample feel politically competent and yet a rather different picture presents itself when we turn to a further aspect of political effectiveness, namely, the belief that one is competent enough to find help and information when one needs it. The findings in Table 35 show that three-fifths of the sample feel confident that they can find out where to get help if they have a problem. This of course does not tell us if in a real-life situation or problem they would actually know where to go. It is interesting however to consider the findings below in the light of responses on the action question in the previous chapter.

Table 35 If you have a problem you can
always find out where to get help

Strongly Agree	17%
Agree	43%
Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	4%
Not sure	16%

The next table presents responses to two questions which are frequently included in public opinion surveys as measures of political cynicism. They are both concerned with attitudes towards politicians and clearly show a strikingly high degree of cynicism comparable with those for adults in, for

example, the Granada/NOP State of the Nation poll.³ This similarity is particularly interesting given that most of the early political socialisation research suggested that while parents might be cynical about politicians they deliberately avoided transmitting this cynicism to their sons and daughters.⁴ This view has been modified in the light of later research with poor white families in the Appalachian mountains who made no attempt to hide their feelings about politicians from their children, but it still stands with regard to middle-class White Anglo-Saxon Protestant families.⁵ In Europe the picture may be rather different.⁶ In France, Laurence Wylie found that parents passed on a very negative view of political authority to their children⁶ and the high level of cynicism revealed here amongst British fifteen year-olds suggests that many British parents may also pass on a cynical view of politicians to their children but without a study matching parents and children this cannot be proved.

Table 36 Political Cynicism

POLITICIANS:

(a) "Promise anything to win an election"

Strongly Agree	36%
Agree	31%
Disagree	10%
Strongly Disagree	10%

(b) "All talk and no action"

Strongly Agree	21%
Agree	37%
Disagree	10%
Strongly Disagree	18%

It is possible also that a quite different interpretation could be placed on these findings. That, in fact, they illustrate a remarkable degree of political realism on the part of most young people. I leave it to the reader to decide whether or not in their experience the majority agreeing to both statements in Table 36 are adopting a realistic view of politicians. However, I think two caveats are in order here. Firstly, the distinction between political cynicism and political realism is by no means clear-cut. There is no contradiction in someone being both cynical and realistic. Secondly, in interpreting these findings it should be kept in mind that for a view to be realistic it needs to be based on knowledge and as we have seen most young people do not know very much about politicians, know even less about what the political parties stand for, and exhibit little realism in their view of other aspects of politics.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The general lack of political awareness revealed in this report must make depressing reading for anyone who is concerned about the future of our representative democracy and the prospects for greater participation by the public. There is something essentially paradoxical about a democracy in which some eighty to ninety per cent of the future citizens (and the present citizenry) are insufficiently well-informed about local, national and international politics to know not only what is happening but also how they are affected by it and what they can do about it. Most of the political knowledge which they do have is of a rather inert and voyeuristic kind and of little use to them either as political consumers or as political actors.

There is a school of thought which argues that for a democratic system to function effectively requires widespread apathy and political ignorance.¹ Active, informed political participation on a large scale would only create an overload in the system and makes it highly unstable and yet, as Graeme Moodie & Gerald Studdert-Kennedy point out, one could just as easily argue that it is surprising that a country like Great Britain has been able to maintain stability in the face of low levels of participation and widespread ignorance about decisions being made in the name of the people.²

There are no grounds for complacency about the effects of mass political ignorance and a number of reasons why we should be deeply concerned about this state of affairs. Jay Blumler, in a paper on the role which the mass media could play in informing people about politics, has suggested three such reasons:

- (i) an ill-informed electorate tends to put pressure on governments to adopt ill-conceived and undesirable policies;
- (ii) many government policies can only be effective if the public comprehend and accepts them; and
- (iii) a politically-ignorant populace is only too easily manipulated.³

The first two reasons demonstrate very clearly why governments have no cause to feel complacent about mass political ignorance, and, indeed, a further reason could be added to Blumler's list, namely, that a populace which does not understand the problems facing a government may not only make undesirable demands on the government, it may also make contradictory and even impossible demands and push these demands to the point of political breakdown.

Blumler's third reason looks at the consequences of political ignorance from the point of view of the governed rather than the governors. This is essentially a negative reason but the more positive side of the coin is that the well-informed electorate will make governments more accountable to it and consequently more representative.

However, it is also apparent that this situation will not improve unless positive steps are taken to remedy it. J. D. B. Miller has argued that "a man who has seen a few elections go by, who has tested the promises of political parties against their preference... is better equipped to see politics whole than an ex-schoolboy who may know nothing but what his teachers have told him"⁴ and yet, as demonstrated by the comparisons drawn between adults and fifteen year-olds, there is little factual justification for Miller's view. Furthermore we cannot rely on purely incidental political learning either inside or outside the classroom. As was seen in Chapter 4 most young people do not turn to their parents or their friends for political information; in many cases for the simple reason that they realise that their parents and friends are unlikely to be better informed than themselves. Potentially the mass media could be an important source of political information, particularly for the young, but so far they have failed to fulfil their potential partly because they have concentrated all too often on political matters which seem to have little relevance to people's everyday lives; partly because they fail to demonstrate to the viewer or the reader the relevance of many political problems, and, related to this, the media all too often fail to explain the context in which a particular political problem or issue arises.

The situation will not be greatly altered by simply increasing the volume and flow of political information. Such an exercise would probably be doomed to failure since most of these young people lack some kind of framework of knowledge, both factual and practical, which will make political situations seem more intelligible and manipulable, and into which new political information could be meaningfully absorbed for future use.

Those young people who receive the more academic forms of education are probably more likely to be capable of constructing their own frameworks of knowledge, although even here this is by no means certain, but for the great mass of school leavers such frameworks are unlikely to develop without some measure of formal political education. It could be argued that any kind of political education is likely to be better than nothing, particularly for those who are most deprived of political information. There is no evidence in Britain to support or refute this statement but Langton and Jennings in the United States found that Negro adolescents who, in comparison with whites of their own age, were relatively deprived of political information found a political education course more interesting and, in terms of their political development, benefited more from it than the whites.⁵ On the other hand,

much of what goes under the name of politics lessons in schools is only likely to provide young people with the kind of coherent framework which is best suited to passing examinations rather than to functioning effectively as political consumers and as political participants.

In contrast, the political literacy approach, as briefly outlined in Chapter 1 and more fully in Working Paper No. 2 issued by the Programme for Political Education, does attempt to provide the kind of coherent framework of knowledge which would enable the individual to function effectively both as political consumer and participant. The starting point of this approach is not knowledge of institutions but knowledge of political issues and problems.⁶ The survey findings presented in this report suggest that issues and problems would indeed be a suitable starting point and not merely because there is so much ignorance of party policies but because so many young people are already interested in political issues, particularly those which directly affect their lives and are perceived to do so.

The term 'relevance' is probably over-used in contemporary educational theories but in an area where there is so much ignorance it is surely sensible to take note of and work from those political matters which most excite the interest and imagination of young people. A similar reason to this has stimulated interest in the "politics of everyday life" as a possible focus for political education. Research is being conducted on this approach by the Political Education Research Unit, under the direction of Professor Ian Lister, at the University of York and it is clearly too soon to draw any conclusions about it. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that very few respondents in the Hansard Society survey seemed to express an interest in political or quasi-political problems in their immediate environment. The problems which they chose did have immediate relevance for them but more often than not they were also problems and issues of national importance such as unemployment and inflation.

However, the survey also indicates some potential problems for any teacher attempting to develop a teaching programme which is as ambitious in its aims as the political literacy approach. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it is clear that a prerequisite for political literacy is a fairly high degree of cognitive development. To be capable of analysing political situations and issues, and the views and policies of others in the ways suggested by the Programme for Political Education, requires cognitive and conceptual skills which, as we have seen, are poorly developed in the majority of teenagers, even though they have undergone (or is it endured?) between nine and ten years of formal education. Cognitive poverty is widespread and it is likely that teaching programmes in politics will be able to achieve little more than pass on a certain amount of factual knowledge unless something is done at the general level of education to enhance young people's cognitive skills.

But this is, of course, a problem for teachers of other specialist subjects ranging from geography and history to physics and for teachers of some vocational and technical subjects also. Secondly, it is also apparent that the low level of political interest exhibited by this age group could be a potential problem for teachers although, hopefully, this disinterest can be countered by teaching programmes which are designed to meet the needs and interests of young people. It is also worth noting that while so many young people seem to be disinterested in politics they have few illusions about their ignorance and are far from complacent about it. As may be seen in Table 38 approximately two-thirds of the sample believe they *need* to know more about politics and three-quarters of them think they *ought* to know more.

Table 38 Self-assessment of Political Knowledge

QUESTIONS	Per cent
(a) How knowledgeable are you in politics and political events?	
very	3%
fairly	38%
not very	40%
not at all	12%
(b) "I know as much about politics and government as I shall ever need to"	
strongly agree	4%
agree	11%
disagree	27%
strongly disagree	33%
(c) Do you think you ought to know more about current affairs and politics?	
YES	74%
NO	19%

Clearly then there are plenty of young people ready and willing to learn if some kind of relevant political education were available. Where else are they likely to receive an adequate political education if not at school or at a further education college. For the majority of these young people there will be few opportunities to politically educate themselves once they have left full-time education except in an incidental and haphazard way.

Some readers may feel that the introduction into schools of teaching programmes which focus on political issues and problems rather than the safer but duller and less relevant study of constitutional conventions and procedures would be tantamount to giving carte blanche to any teacher who wishes to indoctrinate his students. Indoctrination, or the systematic attempt to persuade people to accept and adopt unquestioningly a particular set of beliefs, is always a possibility but the risk is not necessarily confined to politics lessons. A teacher with strong political, religious, racial or moral views could, if he or she desired, attempt to indoctrinate students during science lessons, history, art, religious studies or any other lesson. There are a number of safeguards in the educational system against this happening on a wide scale. A teacher trying to indoctrinate "extremist" views of one kind or another will soon find parents, colleagues and students complaining to the Head teacher or Principal and to the Local Education Authority. On the other hand, indoctrination of "moderate" views, particularly if the teacher shares them with many parents and colleagues, may go unchallenged. It is also unlikely that any teacher endeavouring to politically indoctrinate his students will find a wholly receptive audience. Research on the process of political learning indicates that most young people acquire some political attitudes at an early age from a variety of sources of opinion such as the family, friends and the media, nor are they mere passive recipients of received opinion. They formulate their own attitudes as well. Consequently in the average group of students the teacher will find, not a tabula rasa with regards to politics, but a considerable diversity of opinion on political matters and current affairs. Unfortunately, as this piece of research has shown, the development of political attitudes before adulthood is all too rarely accompanied by a development of political knowledge but nonetheless this early development of political attitudes is an important inhibiting factor on indoctrination.

The possibility of political indoctrination in schools cannot be ruled out and the risk of unintended biases creeping into lessons is even greater. But, to exclude political education from the school, as Ann Vernon has observed,⁷ is not to leave the child or adolescent free from political influences; instead, it exposes them to chaotic learning and to a variety of influences which, if anything, tend to restrict the development of a capacity for evaluating the

political stances adopted by other people and groups and for making balanced, reasoned judgments based on the available evidence. A political education which sought to inculcate a particular set of political beliefs and opinions would be misguided, but a political education which sought to provide young people with transferable skills, a framework of knowledge and concepts, and procedures for assessing the validity of political information, beliefs and values would contribute greatly to both the development of the individual's potential and the development of the democratic process.

Notes:

- 1 See, for example, W. H. Morris-Jones, "In Defence of Apathy", *Political Studies*, II (1964), pp. 25-37.
- 2 G. Moodie & G. Studdert-Kennedy, *Opinions, Publics & Pressure Groups*, (London: 1970), p.21.
- 3 Jay Blumler, "Does Mass Political Ignorance Matter", *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (1974).
- 4 J. D. B. Miller, *The Nature of Politics* (London: 1962), p.286.
- 5 Langton & Jennings, *American Political Science Review* 62, (1968), pp. 859-65.
- 6 See Working Paper No. 5: 'Political Problems and Issues' of the Programme for Political Education.
- 7 Ann Vernon "Politics as remedial education", *Politiks*, July 1971.

Appendix A

HANSARD SOCIETY SCHOOLS SURVEY

The Hansard Society has been given a grant to do a survey among young people in England and Wales on Current Affairs. Your school is one of the 100 or so schools to have been selected for the survey, and we would be grateful for your help in filling in this questionnaire. Please write down what *you* think. The *only* person who will see your answers will be the researcher responsible for this survey.

Thank you for your help!

PART 1

For Office
Use Only

First, some questions about yourself and your school:

- 1 Please write down the name and address of this school:

Name of school:

Address of school:

.....

- 2 At what age do you expect to leave school?

16 years old ☐

17 years old ☐

18 years & above ☐

I am not sure ☐

- 3 Which, if any, of the following subjects have you ever studied, or are studying, at school?

American Politics ☐ General/Liberal studies ☐

British Government/Politics ☐ Geography ☐

Current Affairs ☐ History ☐

Citizenship/Civics ☐ Social Studies ☐

Public Affairs ☐ Sociology ☐

World Problems ☐ Economics ☐

I have never studied any of these subjects

4a How often do you read a daily newspaper?

- Everyday ☐
 4-5 times a week ☐
 2-3 times a week ☐
 once a week ☐
 occasionally ☐
 never ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE

4b Please tick those daily newspapers which you
USUALLY read:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Sun <input type="checkbox"/> | Daily Telegraph <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Daily Mirror <input type="checkbox"/> | Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Daily Express <input type="checkbox"/> | Morning Star <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Daily Mail <input type="checkbox"/> | Local Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Times <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please say which) |

.....

5a How often do you read a Sunday newspaper?

- Every Sunday ☐
 3 times a month ☐
 twice a month ☐
 once a month ☐
 occasionally ☐
 never ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE

5b Please tick those Sunday newspapers which you
USUALLY read:

- | | |
|--|---|
| News of the World <input type="checkbox"/> | Sunday Telegraph <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sunday People <input type="checkbox"/> | Sunday Times <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sunday Mirror <input type="checkbox"/> | Observer <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sunday Express <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please say which) |

.....

- 6 How often do you watch the news broadcast on television?

At least every day ☐

4-5 times a week ☐

2-3 times a week ☐

once a week ☐

occasionally ☐

never ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE

- 7 If you USUALLY watch any of the T.V. programmes listed below, please tick them:

Panorama (BBC1) ☐

This Week (ITV) ☐

Nationwide (BBC1) ☐

World in Action (ITV) ☐

Man Alive (BBC2) ☐

Weekend World (ITV) ☐

Newsday (BBC2) ☐

- 8 How often do you listen to the news broadcast on the radio?

At least every day ☐

4-5 times a week ☐

2-3 times a week ☐

once a week ☐

occasionally ☐

never ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE

- 9 How interested are you in politics and current affairs?

Very interested? ☐

Fairly interested? ☐

Not very interested? ☐

Not at all interested? ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE

- 10 How often do you discuss current affairs and politics with your parents?

Very often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Hardly ever ☐
Never ☐

- 11 How often do you discuss current affairs and politics with your friends?

Very often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Hardly ever ☐
Never ☐

PART II

- 12 In your opinion what is the most serious problem facing you and your generation?

Please write in the space provided below:

- 13 Now could you think about the major Political Parties in this country, Below are a number of statements, each of which has been made recently by members of these political parties. Read these statements carefully and then for *each* statement tick the box below the party which *you* think is MOST LIKELY to have made the statement.

(Tick one box only for each statement)

- #1 "Taxes on both people and industries should be cut as soon as possible";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #2 "The Government should take over and run more industries";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #3 "The Government should stop giving help to private schools and create more Comprehensive schools";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #4 "Workers and management should cooperate together as partners in the running of our industries";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #5 "Council tenants should be encouraged to buy their council houses and flats";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #6 "The amount of public money being spent on defence should be cut and spent instead on such things as education, building new houses and improving the National Health Service";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #7 "If people want to spend their money on a private bed in a hospital or on educating their children at private schools then they should be allowed to do so";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #8 "Inflation can only be checked by passing laws to control wage and price increases";

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Below you will find several questions about Parliament. Each has a number of alternative answers. Please choose the one you think is correct, and put a tick in the appropriate box. If you don't know, just tick the first box and go on to the next question.

14 Who is the Prime Minister at the moment?

- I am not sure ☐
 Jim Callaghan ☐
 Ted Heath ☐
 Harold Wilson ☐
 Margaret Thatcher ☐
 None of these ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

15 Who is the Leader of the Opposition?

- I am not sure ☐
 Ted Heath ☐
 Jeremy Thorpe ☐
 Margaret Thatcher ☐
 Harold Wilson ☐
 None of these ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

16 Who is the Leader of the Liberal Party?

- I am not sure ☐
 Denis Healey ☐
 Enoch Powell ☐
 Jeremy Thorpe ☐
 Harold Wilson ☐
 None of these ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

17 Who is the Foreign Secretary?

- I am not sure ☐
 Sir Geoffrey Howe ☐
 Jim Callaghan ☐
 Enoch Powell ☐
 Denis Healey ☐
 None of these ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

18 How many Members of Parliament are there in the House of Commons?

65 ☐

140 ☐

395 ☐

550 ☐

635 ☐

820 ☐

none of these ☐

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

19a Do you happen to know the name of your local Member of Parliament?

YES ☐

NO ☐

IF YES: please write the name of your MP in the space provided below:

19b To which political party does your local MP belong?

I am not sure ☐

Communist ☐

Conservative ☐

Labour ☐

Liberal ☐

Welsh Nationalist ☐

Other Party ☐

19c If you know the name of the Parliamentary Constituency in which you live please write it in the space provided below:

20 Below are NINE statements, some of which are TRUE, some of which are FALSE. Please tick the answers which you think are the correct ones for each statement.

- #1 "A backbench MP is any Member of Parliament who is not a Government Minister";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #2 "The Political Party which gets the most votes at a General Election always forms the Government";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #3 "A General Election must be held at least every FOUR years in this country";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #4 "Anyone over the age of 18 can become a Member of Parliament";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #5 "Before an MP can become a Government Minister responsible for a particular subject (e.g. Industry) he must have had some previous experience in that subject";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #6 "Members of Parliament do not have to live in the Constituencies which they represent";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #7 "The Prime Minister is the only person who can choose when to call a General Election";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #8 "Local Councillors have the right to change laws which have been passed by Parliament";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- #9 "Local Councillors have to stand for election once every three years";

TRUE	FALSE	I AM NOT SURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21a Below is a list of things which Parliament is said to do. Put a tick in the first column of boxes by the side of the MOST IMPORTANT thing which you think Parliament does.

	THE MOST IMPORTANT (tick one)	OTHERS WHICH ARE IMPORTANT
1) makes laws governing the country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) discussed all the main issues of the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) provides a group of people from whom the government is chosen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) tries to control what the Government is doing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) tells the people what the Government is doing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6) passes on the view of the people to the Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7) makes all the important decisions on the running of the country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8) I am not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21b Put ticks in the 2nd column by the side of the OTHER THINGS which Parliament does which you think are ALSO very important.

22. Name FOUR Pressure Groups in Britain (NOT COUNTING THE POLITICAL PARTIES) which have a great deal of influence on the decisions made by the Government:

1.
2.
3.
4.

And now could you say who is responsible for the following public services. For example, in the case of water supply, if you think the Government is responsible tick the box in the 1st column, if you think it is the Local Council tick the box in the 2nd column, and if you think a Regional Board is responsible for supplying water than put a tick in the 3rd column. If you do not know put a tick in the 4th column.

	The Government	Local Council	Regional Board	I Am Not Sure
Water Supply	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refuse Collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parks and Swimming Pools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electricity Supply	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing Houses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART IV

In this section the questions deal with International Affairs. As before, please tick the appropriate answer boxes.

- 24 Which of the following countries are members of the European Economic Community or Common Market?

Belgium	<input type="checkbox"/>	Soviet Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
Denmark	<input type="checkbox"/>	South Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>
France	<input type="checkbox"/>	Switzerland	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holland	<input type="checkbox"/>	U.S.A.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Italy	<input type="checkbox"/>	United Kingdom	<input type="checkbox"/>
Luxembourg	<input type="checkbox"/>	West Germany	<input type="checkbox"/>
Norway	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Eire	<input type="checkbox"/>	I AM NOT SURE	<input type="checkbox"/>

25 Which of the following countries have Communist Governments?

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Austria | <input type="checkbox"/> | Portugal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| East Germany | <input type="checkbox"/> | Soviet Union | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hungary | <input type="checkbox"/> | South Africa | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sweden | <input type="checkbox"/> | Switzerland | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Italy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yugoslavia | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Iraq | <input type="checkbox"/> | I AM NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> |

26 And now some more TRUE or FALSE statements. Please tick the answer which you think is the correct one for each statement.

#1 "Japan is now ruled by a military government which is not elected by the people."

TRUE ☐ FALSE ☐ I AM NOT SURE ☐

#2 "Elections for President of the United States are held every FOUR years."

TRUE ☐ FALSE ☐ I AM NOT SURE ☐

#3 "Al Fatah is a group of black African revolutionaries opposed to the white Government in South Africa."

TRUE ☐ FALSE ☐ I AM NOT SURE ☐

#4 "South Africa is no longer a member of the Commonwealth."

TRUE ☐ FALSE ☐ I AM NOT SURE ☐

#5 "The IRA is a Protestant organisation set up to prevent Ulster from being united with the rest of Ireland."

TRUE ☐ FALSE ☐ I AM NOT SURE ☐

- 27 Read the following passage and then answer the questions below it:

"When a well-known and very controversial politician was invited to give a speech at a public meeting, the Chief Constable told the organisers that they should cancel the meeting because he felt that there was a risk of violence breaking out between groups of people with different opinions."

- a) DO YOU THINK THE MEETING SHOULD BE CANCELLED OR HELD AS PLANNED?

The meeting should be cancelled ☐

The meeting should go on as planned ☐ PLEASE TICK
ONE BOX ONLY

I am not sure ☐

- b) BRIEFLY EXPLAIN IN THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW JUST WHY YOU TICKED THIS PARTICULAR BOX:

- 28 Read the following passage and then answer the questions written below:

"When the Broughton Town Council decided to build a new by-pass road they started buying land, but although they were offering what they thought was a fair price one man refused to sell his land. The Council met to discuss the situation but they could not agree about what should be done."

- a) IF YOU WERE A MEMBER OF THIS COUNCIL HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH THIS LANDOWNER? WOULD YOU:

1. Force the man to sell his land ☐

2. Drop the plans for the new road ☐

3. Offer the man more money to encourage him to sell ☐ PLEASE TICK
ONE BOX ONLY

4. I am not sure ☐

- b) NOW BRIEFLY EXPLAIN IN THE SPACE BELOW
JUST WHY YOU TICKED THIS PARTICULAR BOX:

- c) If your Local Council planned to build a new road in your area and this meant that your home would be pulled down, what is the first thing that you would advise your parents to do to try and get this proposal changed:

1. Do nothing because you can't change official plans ☐
2. Complain to your local Councillor ☐
3. Complain to the local Council Planning Department ☐
4. Write to your local Member of Parliament ☐
5. Write to the Government ☐
6. Sign a petition to be sent to the Council ☐
7. Write a letter to the local newspaper ☐
8. Join or organise a protest march ☐
9. Join or organise a group to pressure the Council to change their plans ☐
10. I AM NOT SURE ☐

PLEASE
TICK
ONE
BOX
ONLY

- d) If the advice which you first gave did not work, what else would you suggest that your parents could do:

Please write in the space below:

- 29 When a report showed that too many people were being killed in motorbike accidents the Government decided that in future everyone riding a motorbike must wear a crash helmet. Some people said that they would refuse to obey this law. In their opinion the Government did not have the right to make them wear crash helmets.

a) WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DO YOU AGREE WITH:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. The Government is right to make people wear crash helmets | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The individual should be allowed to decide whether or not to wear a crash helmet | <input type="checkbox"/> PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY |
| 3. I AM NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> |

b) BRIEFLY EXPLAIN BELOW JUST WHY YOU TICKED THIS PARTICULAR BOX:

PART VI

Below are a number of statements with which you may agree or disagree or have no opinion. Please tick the box for each statement which *BEST* describes what *YOU* think.

- 30 "If you have a problem you can always find out where to get help."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 31 "The Political Parties will promise anything to win an election."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 32 "Politics seems so complicated that I can't understand what's going on."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 33 "I know as much about politics and government as I shall ever need to."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 34 "It is important to use your vote because this is one of the ways by which we can have a say in how the country is run."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 35 "Politicians are all talk and no action."

I Agree Strongly	I Partly Agree	I Am Not Sure	I Partly Disagree	I Disagree Strongly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 36 Compared with most people you know, how knowledgeable would you say you were on politics and political events?

Very knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not very knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE TICK
ONE BOX

- 37 Do you think you ought to know more about current affairs and politics?

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX

YES
☐

NO
☐

PART VII

For Office
Use Only

And finally some more questions about yourself.

38. How old are you? _____ years _____ months

39 Are you male or female?

male ☐

female ☐

40 What kind of job does your father/guardian do? If he is retired or unemployed, please describe what he used to do in the box below:

41 How much influence would you say you have in family decisions that concern you?

A lot of influence ☐

Some influence ☐

No influence ☐

I am not sure ☐

42 If you disagree with something a teacher says do you feel free to talk to the teacher about it or not?

I feel free to talk to the teacher about it ☐

I do *not* feel free to talk to the teacher about it ☐

I am not sure ☐

43 If you do not object to being interviewed at school some time later in the year then please put a tick in the box provided below: And write your name in the space provided:

I do not object to being interviewed ☐

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Name:

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

To obtain a systematic sample for the entire population of fifteen year-olds in state secondary schools in England and Wales, the following procedure was adopted:

- (i) 36 Local Education Authorities were selected at random from the 108 established after the local government reorganisation initiated by the 1972 Local Government Act. Letters were sent to the Chief Education Officers of each LEA explaining the purpose of the survey and seeking their permission to approach, if necessary, schools within their areas. Permission was obtained from 33 authorities.
- (ii) All the secondary schools in these LEAs were then listed according to type (i.e. Grammar, Modern, and both types of Comprehensive). A stratified sample of schools was then randomly selected from each list in direct proportion to their actual distribution as depicted by the sampling frame in Table A below.¹ The figures for Grammar and Modern schools are based on DES statistics for 1973-74 while the figures for co-existing and non-coexisting comprehensives are based on the statistics and extrapolations produced by Benn and Simon.² Table A also shows the number of schools which were selected through the above procedure.
- (iii) The Head teachers of the 100 schools thereby selected were then approached to obtain their cooperation and permission for conducting the survey in their schools. For a variety of reasons 19 per cent immediately responded that they were unable to participate and a further 9 per cent dropped out after they had already been sent the questionnaires. This left a final sample of 72 schools. The breakdown of the sample by type of school is shown in Table B and shows that in terms of Table A secondary modern schools are slightly over-represented and non-coexisting comprehensives are under-represented but basically the final sample may be said to be fairly representative of the national distribution.

Table A Sampling Frame

SCHOOLS	Comprehensives			
	Coexisting	Non-coexisting	Grammar	Modern
National Distribution (%)	27	22	13	38
Number selected (N)	27	22	13	38

Table B Number of Schools in the Sample

	%	N	Pupils
Coexisting Comprehensives	26	19	1,089
Non-coexisting Comprehensives	17	12	1,170
Grammar	15	11	484
Modern	42	30	1,290

- (iv) A sampling frame based on type of school rather than some other variable does, of course, have considerable advantages if there are severe limits on budget, time and staff but it should be noted that this method of sampling only ensures a representative sample of schools and not necessarily a representative sample of fifteen year-olds. It is therefore always possible that there will be some demographic imbalances in the sample. Although there are roughly equal groups from each sex (51% boys, 49% girls) there are some minor regional imbalances even though regional variations were accounted for in the sample design. As may be seen in Table C, the South West and Wales are slightly over-represented and the Midlands and North East are under-represented.

Table C

REGION	%
London	11
South East	29
South West and Wales	19
Midlands	12
North East	9
North West	19
	99%

Size of school can also be a critical factor in designing a sampling frame, and here too we find regional differences. For example, two comprehensive schools in the sample were drawn from Wales and these were considerably larger than the comprehensives in some of the more urban Educational Authorities. It was therefore necessary to weight the sample to allow for this.

Finally, one other factor which was not accounted for in the sampling frame but which could lead to imbalances in the sample, is parental occupational class. However, as may be seen from Table D, a classification of the occupations of these young people's parents produces an occupational breakdown very similar to statistics for adults with, perhaps, the one exception that the children of skilled manual workers are slightly under-represented. To measure parental occupation each respondent was asked to provide information about his or her father's job or, if this was not available or unknown, then the mother's job; and their answers were then classified according to the Registrar General's Classifications of Occupations.

Table D

Parental Occupational Class

	N	%	
I Professional, managerial	114	3	
II Intermediate	468	12	NON-MANUAL 29%
III Skilled non-manual	549	14	
IV Skilled manual	505	12	
V Semi-skilled manual	848	21	MANUAL 45%
VI Unskilled manual	493	12	
Occupation inadequately described	289	7	
Father deceased, retired	90	2	
Not answered	671	17	

1 Statistics of Education 1973-74, Department of Education & Science (HMSO).

2 C. Benn & B. Simon, *Half Way There*, (London: 1972, 2nd edition).

